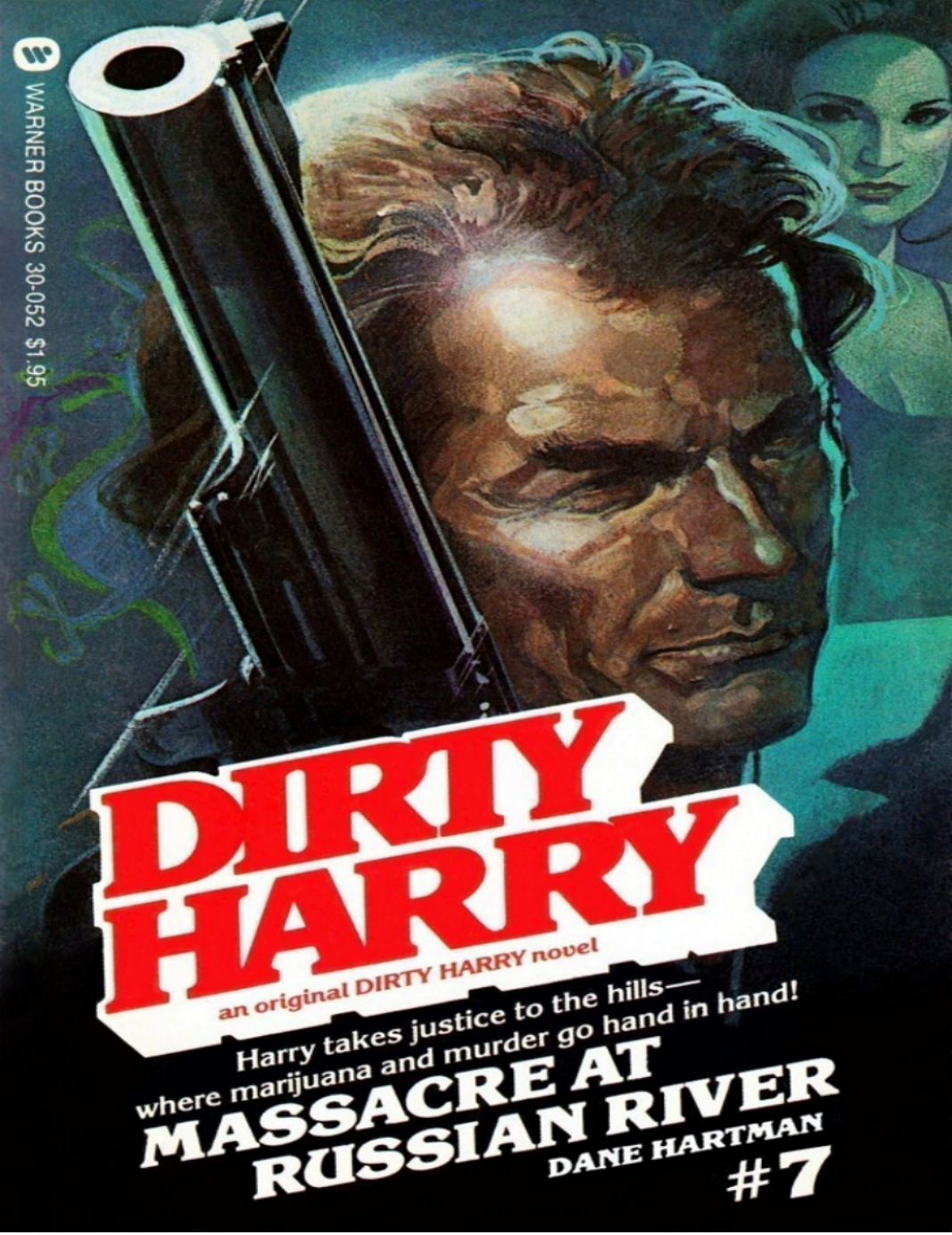
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Kilborn surprised Harry by flattening himself out in the path of the oncoming vehicle. Harry couldn't stop or redirect the van in time and ran right over him. But he heard none of the sounds one would customarily expect running over a body. He guessed that being as thin as he was, Kilborn had managed to position himself in such a way that all four tires had missed him completely.

Harry couldn't be sure though. He brought the van to a stop, opened the door and peered back.

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DIRTY HARRY #7

Massacre At Russian River

Dane Hartman

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DIRTY HARRY #7

MASSACRE AT RUSSIAN RIVER

Opening Round

North of San Francisco, Highway 101 runs through Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties straight into Oregon. Right across the line separating Mendocino from Humboldt can be found the Old Redwood Highway, a two-lane blacktop characterized by trees that have spent thousands of years reaching for the sky.

Old Redwood yields onto a mud road riddled with potholes which in turn gives way to other roads, steeper, more impenetrable. After a while, if no one puts a stop to one's progress, one comes to the very heart of marijuana country.

There, among the giant trees and the thick nettled brush, gardens are filled with Guerrero, purple skunk, sinsemilla, Thai, Columbian, and Kauai, pedigree, and hybrid, weed that drives a man crazy and weed that does nothing but make him cough into the night.

People make hundreds of thousands of dollars there, sometimes millions, while remaining perpetually stoned in the process.

That was how Jud Harris went about his life, at least until one afternoon early last autumn.

Harris stands at six-three and has a wired intensity about him, a piercing stare, and a set of thin lips that hold back a smile like a hidden treasure. He favors loose overalls, sports a beard, and wears his hair so long in back that in order to make it manageable he's knit it into a ponytail. He goes about in hip-high boots, prowling his garden. His plants are all in a row. That way, he thinks, they won't be so easily spotted from the air.

The thousands of dollars that Jud Harris raked in last year are not in plain sight. The house that he and his old lady Bonnie share is a modest five-room affair, put together on the cheap with materials pillaged from a crumbling barn located down the road a piece. One of those five rooms has a crib in it. No baby, just the crib. The baby is due in mid-November.

Jud has a four-wheel-drive. Just about all the marijuana farmers thereabouts do because there's no other way of getting around. In addition, he has a pick-up and a car, but they wouldn't be considered luxuries.

Most of Jud's money has found its way to San Francisco, where he maintains a beautiful house overlooking the bay. He and Bonnie go to

that house whenever they feel like getting away from marijuana country on a vacation.

Even dopesters need vacations. Weed is not always a fun business.

It was a little after four in the afternoon. The sun was out, for the first time in days. Shafts of its radiant light penetrated the outstretched branches of the trees that ringed the electronic fence Jud had constructed. When it had last gone off Jud had rushed from his house, a .22 rifle in his hands, only to discover that a curious deer had triggered it. He and Bonnie had feasted on venison that night.

No road led to the Harris farm. The road was half a mile away; it just sort of dropped off into mud that, for all the sun it got, never quite hardened. But Jud and Bonnie could still hear traffic on the road or what passed as traffic because generally no more than two or three vehicles used it in any one twenty-four-hour period.

Bonnie was a woman of juices and flesh, even before she became pregnant. Her face was pretty, dairy-maidish; the rest of her spread out and blossomed, no angles, no curves, just lots of soft round contours.

“Jud, it’s the Reardons!” she called. She knew the sound of their truck. She didn’t need to see the whites of their eyes to identify her visitors.

The Reardons, Tom and Tom Jr., his son, and Lou, his brother, had been coming around of late, making inquiries, expressing an interest in buying out Jud. Jud didn’t want to be bought out. He was happy, he was rich and getting richer. He liked tending his weed, he liked experimenting with fertilizer and crossbreeding plants, and he didn’t see what else he could do in life that would be nearly so satisfying. Besides, even if he wanted to sell his property and the lucrative plant life that sprang from it, he would not for one moment consider selling to the Reardons.

The Reardons were shit. The Reardons carried the plague in their chromosomes. The Reardons were crazy. But the Reardons were persistent.

Jud had been talking to some of his fellow farmers. He wasn’t the only one the Reardons had approached. No, they’d been around to most of the farms in the area, playing it real casual, sometimes offering to buy out an entire crop, sometimes offering to go in on a deal, sometimes holding out for the whole shooting match, just as they were doing with him.

They came marching, muddy boots, red faces, over the rise in the

hill, the three of them single file, Tom Sr., leading the way.

Jud didn't know why he should be thinking of grabbing hold of his .22. The Reardons had never used force or threatened either him or Bonnie in any way. If there was any danger at all it was in their eyes; you looked into them and you could see fire simmering inside their skulls.

Still, he told Bonnie to head them off, delay them. He would make certain his gun was within easy reach. He had no intention of actually producing it. That might only provoke them, and if there was one thing Jud Harris was it was peaceful. It was just better to have the weapon available.

If Tom had been a tree, he would have been one of the giant redwoods. Physically, he was an impressive sight, towering above Jud, with a frame that was more massive still and limbs bulging with muscle that seemed ready to burst from the protective skin around it. It was unfortunate that his intelligence was nowhere as formidable as his body. Junior year in high school was as far as his education had taken him. That might not have been a handicap necessarily, but he was in possession of an IQ that would never see the other side of 100. He was probably conscious of his below-average intelligence, and it was equally probable that he used his body to compensate for it.

His son was pushing twenty and was a mite smarter but less strapping, more on the thin side. His gaze was insistent but blank, as though he still hadn't quite figured out what to make of the world. His uncle Lou was built of the same rough-hewn material his brother was, but he hadn't the sheer brawn and craziness that Tom had.

Bonnie stepped forward, barely allowing her eyes to travel back to the open doorway of the house where her husband remained concealed.

"How are you doing today?" she asked with feigned cheerfulness.

"Fine, just fine," Tom Sr., said, assuming the role of spokesman.

"You looking for Jud?"

"That's right."

"He's not here right now."

Tom peered in the direction of the house, clearly unconvinced. "Oh, is that so? His car is here. So's the truck. He surely couldn't have gone far."

Bonnie was improvising fast. "He took a walk over to the Emerson place."

"The Emerson place," Tom said. "Funny, we was just over there and

we didn't see any sign of him. You sure you didn't just lose track of him? It happens, missus can't find her old man. You know how often my missus can't find me?" He laughed. His brother laughed. His son laughed. The family that believed in togetherness.

Jud, having overheard this exchange, decided that there was nothing to be gained by staying out of sight.

"What do you want, Tom?"

"Ah, there you are. And I was just saying to the pretty mama here that I thought you was lost. You wasn't lost, after all."

Jud wasn't interested in pursuing this. "I told you before, I'm not selling. You want to invest in my harvest then that's different. Maybe we can work something out."

Jud was thinking there was no sense riling the man, better to appease him, compromise.

"Maybe we can at that. But the truth of the matter is I want to buy what you have here. I'm willing to pay good money. Ain't that right, Lou?"

Lou obediently nodded. "That's the truth. You're passing up a good deal, Jud, if you refuse."

"Ten thousand dollars cash." Tom was fishing the money from his jacket pocket and starting to count out the bills, slowly, as though he were really quite certain that Jud would accept them.

Jud had never heard Tom cite a definite figure before and was so positively astounded that for a moment his jaw hung open, struck dumb. Even Bonnie, who rarely expressed surprise, remaining tranquil under the most bizarre circumstances (possibly because she was so stoned), could not resist laughing.

"You must be joking," Jud said upon recovering his voice. "Do you have any idea what my crop is worth? Let alone the farm itself."

"I most certainly do. I study my investments before I make them, indeed I do."

"There's nothing further to discuss. Now if you don't mind, I'm busy."

Jud turned around and began walking back toward the house. Bonnie was about to do the same when Tom called to her.

"Hey, pretty mama, wait here."

She had no intention of lingering and continued on. Tom then reached out and gripped hold of her arm.

She shrieked. This made no impression on Tom, who pulled her to

him and then laid his hand against her swelling belly, his fingers digging through the fabric of her crinoline dress into her flesh.

Seeing this, Jud wheeled about. “Take your hands off her,” he commanded.

Bonnie was trying to free herself from the hold Tom had on her, but she hadn’t the strength. Tom continued to knead her stomach. “Hey,” he said, “I can feel him kicking in there.”

Jud lunged for Tom but his intervention did little good; he had Tom Jr., and Lou Reardon to contend with. As if on signal the pair seized Jud and kept him squirming in their grip.

In desperation Bonnie, in a motion too quick for Tom to observe in time, brought her left leg up and kneed him in the groin. He howled in pain and nearly doubled over. Bonnie took advantage of his momentary incapacitation and began to flee.

Tom didn’t run after her. Instead he reached into his jacket and extracted a Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum.

“No!”

Tom looked at Jud with surprise. It was as though he’d forgotten about Jud’s existence. “No?” He shrugged almost as if to say that it really made no significant difference to him one way or another.

Then he readjusted his arm, training the gun not on Bonnie but on the man who was trapped by his brother and son.

An expression of horror and disbelief came over Jud Harris’ face. He struggled more furiously to escape, but Lou and Tom Jr., would not think of releasing him unless Tom commanded them to do so.

Tom delighted in the power of determining a man’s fate.

Jud heard the cock of the gun and cried out in desperation. There were no neighbors to hear him, no one within miles who could come to his rescue. There was no phone.

Bonnie had reached the doorway but remained there, rooted to the spot, sobbing uncontrollably.

“You should’ve taken the cash and run,” Tom declared, shaking his head sadly. “Some people, they just never learn.”

Then he fired.

The bullet punched out a hole directly between Jud’s eyebrows, just at the ridge of the nose.

A bright crimson spot took form. The back of the head—what was left of it—looked a great deal worse. Jud’s body pitched back and would have been hurled some distance away were it not for the grip

his captors maintained on him.

But now, suddenly, Lou let him go. Jud just sort of sagged. Then Tom Jr., let go, and Jud sank soundlessly to the ground.

“Look what you did, Tom,” said his brother, pointing to the blood and viscous material on his shirt. “You got it all over me.”

“I’ll buy you a new shirt, Lou, don’t you worry,” Tom said. He seemed truly apologetic about the mishap.

Right then there was a loud report. The three men turned to see what had caused it.

The answer was immediately apparent: Bonnie was standing in the doorway, the .22 in her arms. But she was shaking so much that the bullet she’d just fired at Jud’s murderers had gone far astray of its mark.

“Shit, and I’d forgotten all about her,” Tom remarked. He appeared to be amused by this turn of events.

Bonnie was aiming again. The three men, not trusting too much to luck, dropped to the ground. The second bullet whistled over their heads and sank into a tree some distance beyond them.

“Nobody taught that pretty mama how to shoot,” said Lou.

“Don’t seem like it, does it?” Tom agreed, carefully sighting his Magnum and firing.

Somebody had damn well taught Tom how to shoot. His bullet went into Bonnie’s abdomen, killing the seven-month-old fetus and causing massive hemorrhaging. The .22 flew from her hands, and she fell across the threshold of her home. There she lay, her twitching legs and muffled screams indicating that she was still alive.

“Here you go, Tom,” the father said, giving his son the Magnum. “Why don’t you finish it for us?”

Tom Jr., gazed at his father uncertainly. He had a great tolerance for bloodletting. He hadn’t recoiled when Jud was shot nor felt particularly saddened when Bonnie’s full stomach burst open. Hadn’t the woman been shooting at them, after all? But this was something else again, administering the *coup de grâce*, though of course, Tom Jr., would not have used such a phrase to describe what his father was urging him to do.

“Come on, take it, Tom.”

Tom Jr., grasped hold of the weapon. Bonnie’s screams were getting louder.

“Finish it, Tom Jr.,” his uncle was saying. “Shut her the hell up.”

Tom Jr., reluctantly advanced across the overgrown lawn. His father and uncle watched him impassively as he stepped up to Bonnie. For several moments he did nothing. He had the gun correctly positioned, but he still wasn't doing anything.

"Come on, boy, get it over with! We haven't got all day."

Another second passed. Then there was an explosion. The screams stopped.

Tom Sr., cast a sidelong glance at his brother. He smiled in satisfaction. "I knew the boy had it in him," he said.

CHAPTER

One

His name was John Raven, but everybody referred to him as Turk. There was some Turkish ancestry in him but it went way back. He didn't seem to like being referred to as Turk, but he just never knew exactly how to convince people to refer to him by any other name.

What Turk did had to be one of the most hopeless jobs ever to be conceived of in any police department in the nation. Turk was in command of the local narcotics squad that worked out of a county-seat courthouse located maybe forty miles from the Harris farm (though that was forty miles as a crow flies, and no four-wheel-drive vehicle enjoyed the freedom a crow did).

There were no windows in Turk's office. This was a source of constant complaint for him. He would have given anything for a view. The walls were adorned with photographs of marijuana plants torn out of *High Times* magazine and Polaroid shots of Turk and various sheriffs posing with bales of confiscated weed. A map of the county was home to several dozen multicolored pins that designated the locations of known and likely marijuana farms. Atop the bookcase were bongs and roach clips, hookahs and hash pipes, lab scales and cookers once used to increase potency of whatever drug had been stuffed inside.

To amuse himself—and his visitors—Turk kept a record player on which he spun old jazz records with such tunes as "Reefer Man," "Whacky Dust," "Weed Smoker's Dream," and "I'm Feeling High and Happy."

If there was one thing that Turk was not though it was high and happy. Too many obstacles were in his way to happiness.

For instance, he had only one man to help him. This was a fellow by the name of Frank Davenport. Unlike Turk, whose beard and wire-rim glasses gave him a vaguely academic air, Davenport was the classical image of an undercover agent, a man who in his attempt to fit in anywhere stood out like a sore thumb. Only one look at the conservative cut of his hair, the shades he wore on even the cloudiest days, and his perpetually polished shoes identified him as some kind of cop.

But Davenport was efficient if unimaginative; his plodding style was not equal to the ambition he harbored for better assignments.

The problem was with the hundreds of people squirreled away in the hills beyond the walls of Turk's office. How could two men hope to stop them all? Catching three or four small timers every month might earn them a citation from the narcotics boys in Washington but it would do nothing to eradicate the marijuana traffic; it wouldn't do a goddamn thing to slow it down for that matter.

There was another problem too: Turk was a crusader. No matter that the situation was an impossible one, he was resolved to conquer the marijuana trade. He had even given himself a deadline, working out a schedule full of one-year and five-year plans. Like a general, he would wander over to his pin-infested map and plot strategy.

Davenport viewed his superior as something of a fanatic. All Davenport wanted really was out. He did not feel like it was his mission on earth to root out all the dealers and growers from the hills of Humboldt and Mendocino counties.

But now, the twentieth day of October, Turk himself was uncertain as to the feasibility of his two-man crusade. His program had been dealt a major setback.

He strode over to the map. He removed a pink pin from it.

"Jud Harris," he said, giving a name to the pin. "Jud Harris and Bonnie Nutting were found dead yesterday. Both shot with a revolver."

Davenport looked up from his desk. He was not familiar with Jud Harris and Bonnie Nutting. Turk, on the other hand, assumed that his colleague was every bit as acquainted with the hundreds of weed farmers as he was.

"Who shot him?"

"I don't know. You know Ham? Ham Kelso? He's with the sheriff's office. He was up there, at the Harris place. He was the one who told me. Said they looked like the worms had enjoyed a good dinner. The Nutting woman was pregnant." For an instant Turk seemed ready to go into detail and Davenport was relieved when he didn't.

"Drug wars," was Turk's verdict. "There's no other explanation."

"So where do we come in?"

"Where we always come in. At the end of the line. The sheriff is convinced that there's an MO developing here. You remember Chapman?"

"The speed freak?"

The very same. Someone blew him away, buried him, stripped his farm, took every fucking thing, the weed, the tools, the machinery, even the goddamn pool table. Same thing happened with Harris. Ham tells me his farm looks like the Mongol hordes rode through. Just mud and shit left, nothing else. And that's not all."

"No?"

"No. Our sheriff is convinced that we've got something like a massacre going on in these hills. Nobody wants to say shit, we're pariahs as far as they're concerned. Everyone's protecting their own turf. But Ham tells me that they've found other bodies up there, buried so long you can't identify them any longer."

"We would have heard something like that. Your friend Ham's been misled."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that. Ham's been reliable in the past. My feeling is that there's more to these killings than we're getting back here. And just this morning, I hear they're recruiting homicide boys from all over the state, pulling them in here to carry on the investigation."

"You can't be serious."

"I am. And you know what it's going to look like when two dozen outside cops start trampling on state's evidence? We'll be back to square one when they get finished. And I guarantee you they're not about to find the killers. I'll lay odds the dopers end up wasting one another, and the only thing left for these cops to do is take up their shovels and bury all the stiffs."

"You'd better hope that there's someone left when the shooting's over," Davenport said.

"And why's that?"

"If they're all going to be dead, you and me will be out of a job."

"You got a point there." For the first time that morning, Turk permitted himself a smile. "Say, Frank, you want to do me a favor? Get Washington on the phone."

"What do you want to say to Washington?"

Turk's smile had a way of turning mysterious. "You'll see, Frank, you'll see. Just go ahead and dial."

* * *

Russian River was like every other town in the region, a collection of unimportant-looking houses, a church, several stores, and two bars. The Russian River from which the town derived its name was two

miles away and waiting impatiently for the fall rains so that it could run loose over its banks, flooding the area just like it did every year at this time.

Harry Callahan had never been in Russian River before. It was not exactly a tourist attraction. He'd ridden by Russian River, but a lot of people had ridden by Russian River. Highway 101 made certain of that.

Harry did not want to be in Russian River. But he had his orders. He was being lent out was what was happening. The word had gone out; Russian River needed cops, detectives used to corpses slit by knives and perforated by gunshots. Russian River was too small to raise its own crop of detectives.

There was no question in Harry's mind that good detectives were not the only thing lacking in Russian River. It looked as though night life here ended before a six-year-old's bedtime. But what struck Harry as he drove down the town's main drag, Van Buren Street, was the number of youths who came into view.

Russian River didn't look like the sort of place that would attract anyone over the age of fifteen unless they had settled there to collect Social Security in sight of the forested mountains that loomed in the distance. But the presence of so many young people, hinted at the abundance of dope to be obtained within the towns precincts. They all had the same dazed, listless expressions that Harry remembered seeing in the Haight-Ashbury district in the late sixties.

Time seemed to have forgotten these sixties' veterans who had failed in any case to acknowledge its passing. Their hair, both men's and women's, was long, their dress uniformly shabby. The appearance of a car on Van Buren Street was something of an event, particularly when it occurred after nine at night. A congregation of youths who were too young to have ever known the sixties firsthand had assembled in front of a garishly lit donut place that was clearly one of the local hangouts.

"Any of you know the way to April Street?"

Harry didn't expect anything good to come of asking the question. On the other hand, he didn't expect anything good to come out of April Street. There was a motel there that Harry was supposed to put himself up at for the duration of the investigation. He did not expect a luxury establishment. The San Francisco Police Department was footing the bill.

In response to his inquiry, a man with hair that hung in coils down his back stepped forward. He thrust his head into the open window, and he could have rubbed noses with Harry had that been his

inclination.

“Who are you, man?”

“You’re not answering my question,” Harry replied as calmly as he could.

“You’re a cop.”

The man hadn’t jumped to this conclusion because of the way Harry was dressed. Rather it was an assessment based on precedent.

‘Why do you say that?”

“Because everyone coming into Russian River is a cop.”

The man spat, leaving a residue of yellowish phlegm on Harry’s cheek. Harry rolled the window up and wiped the spit from his face.

This, he thought, is one hell of a welcome to Russian River.

A more public-spirited fellow a few blocks down Van Buren was better able to direct Harry to his destination—Danton’s Motel Inn—which sat on the north side of April Street in what looked like the middle of nowhere. Despite so much darkness surrounding it, there was no mistaking its location; it was the only place that had lights blazing. Danton’s Motel Inn proclaimed its identity in bright red neon. That was the most arresting aspect of the place. Otherwise, Danton’s resembled a series of Quonset huts around a parking lot barely lit by a single sodium light overhead.

A woman of uncertain age and sobriety appeared in the office after Harry’s repeated clanging of a bell he found on the desk.

“You must be the Callahan gentleman?” she said, peering with myopic eyes down at the register, which was as empty as the parking lot. “You can have Number 8. How long do you plan on staying?”

Harry told her he had no idea.

This gave her pause. Nobody came to Russian River without having a good idea of when they’d leave. “Well, let’s say you give me fifty dollars in advance. That will see you through to Thursday.”

Thursday was five days away. Harry handed her the cash. The woman deposited an overgrown key in his palm. “Anything you need you just let me or Dennis know. Dennis be my husband.”

Harry slid the key into the door of Number 8, only to discover that it was unnecessary. The door was already open.

He walked in, set down his suitcase. He had only one objective in mind: to get a good night’s sleep. Tomorrow, he figured, he’d contend with the various authorities who were waiting to speak to him.

But as soon as he flicked on the overhead light he saw that he might have to postpone sleep for a while. There was somebody sitting on his bed.

“How are you doing, Harry?”

Harry stood there for a few moments, saying nothing.

“Aren’t you going to greet an old friend?” the man on the bed asked him.

“Your notion of friendship and mine happen to differ, Mike.”

“Ah, well, I see at least you remember my damn name. I’d hate to think you’d forgotten.”

“I don’t forget, Mike. I am also not in the habit of forgiving. Now why don’t you take a walk?”

“Nowhere to go. Dull fucking place, Russian River.”

“What are you doing here? How did you know where I’d be?”

“How? Don’t you credit me with any intelligence? I’ve been doing this sort of shit for years. The old lady always assigns 8 to cops, it’s her style. I know.”

“You know?” Harry regarded him dubiously.

“Of course, I know. We’re not on opposite sides, Harry. Not anymore. Hasn’t anybody told you? I’m a cop now myself.”

CHAPTER

Two

And it was true enough. Mike had a badge to prove it, a detective's shield that looked perfectly genuine to Harry's eyes. But how could a former felon, a man whom Harry had taken in once himself, turn into a cop within a period of three years? Jesus might have known how to walk on water and change water into wine, but Mike Kilborn seemed to have pulled off a miracle that was more spectacular still.

And Kilborn's criminal record wasn't the only issue here. He'd done time, been picked up on charges ranging from assault to trafficking in narcotics, gone on the lam after skipping out on bail, dealt drugs in Mexico, smuggled hashish and heroin back and forth between Turkey and western Europe, and now here he was in the middle of Russian River, sitting in Danton's Motel Inn, flashing a police badge.

That was just a part of it. Given the abundance of illicit substances that he'd done over the years, the acid, the hash, the heroin, the DMT, cocaine, the barbituates, the ludes, the amphetamines, the opium, MDA, PCP, White Cross, Mauna Loa, the Methaqualone, Thai sticks, and Pattaya Beach buds, it was a wonder that anything of his mind was intact.

"You want to explain that?" Harry asked, indicating the shield. This will be very interesting, he thought.

"No problem. Couple of years ago when I was in the joint the Man came to me, said, 'Mike, you're in a lot of trouble.' Well, that makes sense. I'm doing a ten- to twenty-year stretch in Folsom, hey, you don't have to tell me about trouble. You hear me? But the Man says, 'We know you have lots of connections, Mike.' Of course, I do. That's my life, connections. When it comes to connections Ma Bell has nothing over me. You hear me?

"The Man says, 'Would you be willing to use those connections for us? You do and we'll spring you.' Now that sounded very interesting, working for the other side. But I told them that the D.A. had made the same kind of offer. Why should I listen to him? But the Man said, 'You don't know the power I have. I can do a lot more for you than the D.A. ever could.' "

"And so the Man, as you call him, procured that for you?"

Harry's eyes were still fixed on the shield.

"You got it. My ambition in life is not to be a snitch. I wanted something bigger."

"Yeah, you always did aspire to higher things, Mike. You wouldn't want to tell me the name of the Man."

"You could threaten to cut off my dick and I wouldn't tell you. You know how it is? But believe me, the Man is *very* high up. I'm not talking about Sacramento now."

The implication was that the Man, Mike Kilborn's rabbi, worked with the Feds.

"Next question."

"Shoot."

"What the hell are you doing in my room?"

Kilborn used his false teeth to good advantage when he smiled.

"I figured you'd want to know." In a show of bravado, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a joint that was nicely tapered and covered with chocolate paper. Though he knew very well Harry would refuse to share it with him he offered nonetheless, laughing when the inevitable rebuff came. "This is dynamite shit. Homegrown." He pointed vaguely in the direction of the mountains visible through the solitary window in the drab motel room.

"Get to the point. I'm tired."

"You shouldn't be in such a hurry. This is a very mellow place."

A cloud of potent smoke issued from his mouth, half-concealing his face.

"Am I going to have to throw you out?"

"No, that won't be necessary. My purpose here is to offer my services to you. Don't look at me like that. Tomorrow you'll go see the local narks, Turk and Davenport, and they're going to offer you a chance to ride in their special Sikorsky helicopter, take you for a reconnaissance tour of the terrain. And that is how it is, man, I am telling you. You have two believers in the power of technology. Turk has his map full of pins and his five-year plans. The way he figures it, he'll have the weed business eliminated entirely if he's given more toys to play with. I mean radar, I mean choppers. That sort of shit. But there's one hitch. The fucker doesn't have any connections on the ground. He's waging war against the growers the way Johnson and Nixon tried fighting the Cong in Vietnam."

"And you're telling me you have the connections on the ground."

"Absolutely. You want to stick with me, Harry, you'll learn much."

"About the murders?"

"About murder, mayhem, whatever you'd like to know."

"You have any idea who killed Harris and Nutting?"

"And who offed Chapman and Smith and Horgan and Quidlock. Never heard of them, have you? You don't know what kind of burial ground they got up there. You don't know shit. And Turk won't educate you. And you know damn well that he wouldn't want to even if he could. These cops coming up here are giving him a sour disposition. He thinks they're muscling in on his territory. All he'll do is stonewall you, play with you, maybe, if he can, stage some scenario where you get your ass kicked in, enough so you'll go scurrying back where you came from. You and the others."

"Why me?"

The answer came promptly. "Because I like you, Harry."

"Yeah, sure. You make this offer to the other homicide detectives that have come up here?"

"Just you. I swear."

"Get out of here."

"Hey, don't get testy. You shop around, see what everyone else has to offer you. You'll see what I'm saying is true. Mention my name. See the kind of reaction you get. Then when you're ready for me, I'll be back. You never have to look far. I'm always around."

Kilborn slid past Harry, a thin, shadowy figure with the air of a fugitive about him. "Later, my man," he said and vanished into the dark of the parking lot.

The sodium lamp had been extinguished there, to save electricity. The only source of illumination was the red neon letters that signaled to those driving up and down April Street that when all the other choices of lodgings had been exhausted, there was always Danton's Motel Inn.

Turk Raven had appropriated the unused courtroom to deliver his orientation lecture to the half dozen homicide detectives who had so far assembled in Russian River. He was to brief the men and to coordinate their activities. He hadn't gotten all he wanted from his superiors in Washington, but at least he had the satisfaction of knowing he enjoyed some control over this operation.

He was standing up on the dias, where the judge usually sat, and with a pointer was directing his audience's attention to a map of the

region, an enlargement of the map hanging in his office.

The mountains had names like Lunar, Inca, Rain, and Summer. Some were more hill than mountain actually, but this topographical discrepancy didn't bother Turk. In fact, he eschewed the use of their true names for a military-sounding parlance, referring to them as Alpha, Beta, Charlie, and Delta mountains. Each one was a potential battleground.

The more that Turk expounded on his elaborately contrived strategy the more enthusiastic he became. He no longer viewed the newly arriving cops as a threat to his five-year plan. On the contrary, he now saw the imported cops in a whole new light; they could be employed to advance his timetable. He had Washington's approval for this. Or that was how he had chosen to see the situation. The cops would be led to assume that they'd be investigating a string of murders—and yet what they'd really be doing was something quite different: aiding in the destruction of the marijuana business, vanquishing it entirely from Mendocino and Humboldt counties.

And if this happened, one of the prime beneficiaries would be Turk himself. Already he was picturing himself behind a desk with a window overlooking the Potomac. A salary commensurate with such a position featured significantly in his fantasies.

Turk was just concluding his lecture, which had by this point gone on for nearly an hour, when a man entered the courtroom, distracting him from what he was saying.

"Who are you?" Turk asked, irritated.

"Callahan, SFPD,"

"Callahan? You're late. I am just about to finish my briefing."

"I think you've got it wrong. I am exactly on time."

There was a sudden burst of laughter from the six detectives who'd had to suffer through Turk's rambling exposition.

Turk flushed. He did not know exactly how to respond. At last he grumbled, "You'll have to ask one of the other men what I said. I'm not going to repeat myself."

"From the looks on these gentlemen's faces I expect that you already have."

Turk glowered at him but refrained from saying anything more. He realized he'd only be getting himself in deeper.

He redirected his attention to the officers in front of him.

"Tomorrow morning we will begin with the reconnaissance surveys of the terrain in question. We'll go up two at a time beginning at eight

o'clock. That way you can see what we're dealing with. Either my colleague, Mr. Davenport, will be with you or myself. Sheriff Marsh will be next to give you a summation of the progress his office has made so far on the Harris and Nutting killings. Thank you and good day."

He strode from the dias, still seething over Harry's interruption. Davenport, who throughout the whole lecture had sagely maintained silence, followed promptly.

Sheriff Wardell Marsh was a gruff and straightforward man. It was evident that in this case he was in way over his head. Before these killings had begun, only one murder had occurred in his jurisdiction, and that had resulted from a domestic quarrel to which the leading suspect, the husband of the deceased, had immediately confessed. Marsh had little experience with complicated investigations.

Nobody was likely to confess to the murders of Harris, Nutting, or Chapman or any of the others whose skeletal remains had not yet been correctly dated by forensic specialists, let alone identified. Census-takers and revenuers so seldom ventured into the woods where the victims had lived that no record could be relied upon to discover who lived in the area. How was Marsh to determine who had died there then?

"That is where you men come in," he was saying. "Before we can find our murderers we have to see if Harris and Nutting were the only victims or whether there were others. We have one suspected death that might be related—Evans Chapman—though accident has not been ruled out altogether. And there may be others."

This was the first official hint that the homicide detectives might have more on their hands than just the slaying of one couple. Marsh was loath to exaggerate or make unfounded allegations. For all he knew, the five other unidentified bodies might have been killed so long ago that they could be separated from the case at hand and forgotten about.

"Of course, the main difficulty we have here in this area is that anyone involved in the marijuana trade has enemies. Some of them may be known to the victims, some not. There are thieves who will resort to violence. There are also members of the syndicate who might be interested in reaping some of the enormous profits that these growers are accustomed to making."

It was Davenport who answered the door when Harry sought admission to Turk's office. Turk wasn't anywhere to be seen.

"Where is he?"

Davenport shrugged. "He has a friend in town he goes off to see sometimes." As though that wasn't enough he added, "A woman."

"I see."

"Nobody's perfect," said Davenport with an air of resignation. "Have a seat."

Music was playing in the background. Harry listened for a moment and was surprised to hear what sounded like jazz from a much earlier age.

"That's Sidney Bechet with Noble Sissie's Swingers," Davenport explained. "Tune called 'Viper Mad.' I know them all by heart by now. It's Turk's music, but I've gotten accustomed to it after all this time."

"Is that the method he uses to get to know his enemies?"

"Frankly, Callahan, I don't know what's in his mind. Turk's a complicated man."

When Harry said nothing he went on. "I assume you are here for something specific."

"You acquainted with a joker named Mike Kilborn?"

Davenport slowly nodded. "Everyone in these parts knows Mike Kilborn. He come on to you?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"He's in tight with the dealers. No question about it. I know the story he's selling, that he's working for our side. But whatever side it is, it isn't the side I represent. But he's right about one thing. He has some powerful friends. Turk tried busting him a couple of times. We caught him with what he told us was evidence. In fact, he made the buy for himself. The guy's dealing like half the population of this town is dealing, only on a larger scale."

"What happened when he was busted?"

"Shit happened was what happened. The word came down to release him. The word came from Washington incidentally. We were told that by arresting the guy we were getting in the way of an important investigation. Nobody told us what kind of an important investigation, but when Turk asked he was given the brush-off. Evidently, it wasn't our business to know."

Harry stood up. This surprised Davenport. "That's all you wanted to know?"

"One step at a time," Harry said.

"Well, whatever the hell you do, don't trust Mike Kilborn."

“You don’t have to worry. I wasn’t counting on trusting anybody in this town.”

Davenport wasn’t offended by this. “I know what you mean, Callahan,” he said. “I know just what you mean.”

CHAPTER

Three

Sluggish gray clouds hung close to the summit of the mountains. The uncertain meteorological conditions failed to daunt Turk from proceeding with his scheduled air surveillance. He chose Davenport to accompany the first group of detectives in the air, but there was really little for Davenport to do because of the persistent cloud cover.

It wasn't until shortly after noontime that the sun dispelled the gloom sufficiently for the landscape to become fully visible.

Then Turk elected to conduct the tour. Standing by the side of the Sikorsky, he resembled a master of ceremonies patiently awaiting the arrival of his guests.

The first to show up was a man from the sheriff's office who carried a gun and an explanation for his unexpected presence.

"Wardell thinks you might run into trouble," said the man, "so he felt I ought to come along for the ride."

"What kind of trouble?" Turk was a man who did not appreciate learning things second-hand.

The man shrugged. "I don't know. Wardell didn't confide in me. I expect that one of his informers turned up with some bad news. It happens that way sometimes."

"Trouble!" Turk repeated, openly scornful of the idea. "Well, come along then if you must. What's your name?"

"Henry Beller."

Turk glanced at the rifle in his hands. "You know how to use that thing?"

"As well as the next man."

This seemed to satisfy the narcotics investigator.

Presently Turk's other guests arrived, including the pilot, a man whose diminutive size suggested that under other circumstances he could have been a jockey.

Harry, characteristically, was the last to show.

Turk glared at him. "I am surprised you came."

Harry resisted making the comment Turk expected from him.

The two detectives, in addition to Harry, who had chosen to accept Turk's personal aerial tour were from San Jose and Palm Springs. It was difficult for Harry to determine whether they'd been shipped north because of their vast experience and expertise in ferreting out murderers or because they were so near retirement age that their departments could easily do without their services for a prolonged period of time.

One of them, the one from Palm Springs, made it pretty clear to Harry which explanation was the more likely when he said, in a voice too soft for Turk to hear, "I don't know what kind of energy you're planning on putting into this case, but I'm not looking to bust my ass on this one. I want to be alive and well to collect my pension. You understand what I am saying?"

Harry understood all right.

Above the mountain that the mapmakers called Lunar and Turk called Alpha, the helicopter hovered for several minutes while Turk pointed out the ground where some of the finest marijuana in the state of California was awaiting harvesting.

"How can you tell it's marijuana from up here?" asked the detective from San Jose who strained to distinguish the illegal crop in the checkerboard patterns of the landscape.

Turk prided himself on his familiarity with his territory and with the acuity of his eyesight in such things. "You can tell because it doesn't look right. It's not natural. It wouldn't be growing here by itself. You develop an instinct for what belongs and what doesn't."

This explanation was not going to prove at all helpful in aiding the detectives on their own. Harry had the impression that this was just how Turk wanted it. Turk was the man with the knowledge, this was his turf, and he had no intention of sharing either.

"You got a question, Callahan?" Turk asked.

"No. No question."

"And no answer either, I bet."

"That's right."

The two detectives and the man from the sheriff's office looked from one to the other in an attempt to decipher the meaning of this exchange.

The helicopter had banked off to the right. They were over Rain Mountain. Here the trees grew in such profusion that it didn't appear as though the sun could ever penetrate to the earth from which they sprung.

Nonetheless, on these slopes too Turk was able to make the necessary discriminations and point out the location of two fields—or gardens as the growers preferred to call them, regardless of their size.

"If you know where all the shit is, where each of the farms are, why don't you just go in there and bust the hell out of them?"

The detective from San Jose had a point.

"It's not that simple," said Turk. "We need reasonable grounds. We need warrants. Judges aren't always so cooperative. Besides, there's a problem with manpower."

"The Feds could do it if they wanted."

Turk shrugged as if to say the Feds could do any damn thing they pleased but just in theory. "Remember, there's a limited budget. You have your Mexican border and your Florida smuggling operations and your Middle East poppy growers and your Marseilles connections. So it's not like you can just concentrate on two counties in California."

"Budgets," muttered the Palm Springs detective. "The only thing I know about budgets is that they're always cutting them."

Turk directed the pilot to take them lower. "There's something interesting here I'd like you gentlemen to see."

They never had a chance to find out what it was. No sooner had the helicopter descended to just above the treeline than there was a deafening explosion. This was followed moments later by a series of pops. These were less noisy, more hollow in quality, the sound of an inflated balloon punctured with a pin.

Before the occupants of the Sikorsky could manage to ascertain the source of these detonations their craft listed sharply, beginning to veer off to the right on a course headed down into the trees.

The jarring movement upset the men from their seats. Harry had been thrown to the floor and was now attempting to get right himself. But this was not so easily done since the detective from Palm Springs had landed on top of him. And the detective from Palm Springs was not cooperating; he insisted on staying right where he was, flung on top of Harry.

Harry quickly realized there was a reason for the man's failure to cooperate. A chunk of something sizable, perhaps from a projectile, perhaps a part of the helicopter itself, had been hurled into his stomach and gone out the other way, leaving a gaping hole that immediately filled with blood, blood that was now soaking into Harry's jacket. No life remained in the detective. Someone else would have to collect his pension for him.

He was not the only one who'd suffered harm. The pilot's head was

bloody, half of his face seemed to have disappeared, exposing for a brief moment the white of the skull before the blood covered it over. It was impossible to determine immediately whether or not he was alive.

The man from the sheriff's office was struggling to put his gun to use. But how? Who was there to shoot? The explosions had ceased, the helicopter was speeding far from the site of the ambush, but it was doing so without anyone in control.

Turk and the detective from San Jose were apparently too dazed to recognize the peril of their situation. A gash had opened up in Turk's forehead and blood was oozing down his face; he did not seem to be aware of his injury. All he kept doing was shaking his head vehemently as though by doing that he could regain command of his senses.

Harry was in a bad position, unable to wrest control of the craft from the critically injured pilot in time to prevent it from dropping down into the trees. He tried, stretching his arms as far as he could, but the descent of the damaged helicopter was so precipitous that he was once more thrown by the motion.

All at once the helicopter struck the tops of the trees. For an instant they seemed to hold it up. Then there was a great deal of noise, many things breaking simultaneously, bits of the Sikorsky, bits of the trees, metal and wood snapped, glass ruptured and shattered, the rotors broke off, one by one, as easily as if they'd been matchsticks.

Then there was no more resistance from the branches and foliage, and the helicopter, broken and punctured, dropped farther, spinning crazily, shearing off branches and trunks.

Again and again the passengers, living and dead, were thrown against the walls of the craft. There were shrieks and curses and the sound of flesh giving way to metal. Henry Beller still clutched his useless gun, and then suddenly he vanished. Harry had looked and seen him beside him, and then he had looked again and he wasn't there any longer. He'd been sucked out of a hole that should not have been there, a great big jagged hole created by the crash. This had taken place so fast that poor Beller had gone without a sound.

Suddenly there was a noise as loud as anything Harry had ever before heard in his life, a terrific clatter of machinery ripping finally, fatally apart; then a shuddering of metal and a poisonous smell of fuel.

They were on the ground. But not safe. What was left of the helicopter would probably catch fire and explode at any moment.

It was all that Harry could do to drag himself out of the tangled

ruins. He hurt and hurt in so many places that he could not determine whether any of his injuries were serious enough to demand immediate attention. He hoped not. Immediate attention was out of the question at this point.

He found himself pulling someone's arms and meeting resistance. It was the detective from San Jose. Harry soon discovered that the man's legs were snared in the wreckage. Though he was alive, there was no way that Harry could pry him out of it. He was left with no choice. He could do nothing for the man.

But there was something he could do for Turk, who lay prostrate across the shattered floor of the downed craft. Aside from blood smearing his face, no other external injuries were in evidence. But it was possible that something vital had come apart inside. And it was also possible that Turk was suffering from shock.

Harry applied what strength remained to him to pull the narcotics officer out of the helicopter. Turk wouldn't move on his own. Nor could Harry communicate with him. Turk's eyes were open, his mouth seemed to move in mimicry of speech, but he gave no indication that he had any idea of what his predicament was.

Harry hoisted him erect and maintained him that way with his arm as he steered him away from the helicopter. Watching them both was the trapped detective from San Jose. His agonized scream followed them like a curse.

The scream was lost in a roar of flames that suddenly shot into the sky from which the helicopter had just come. No more than five seconds passed before the fuel was ignited. The explosion had been a dress rehearsal for the apocalypse. It sounded very much as though the world had come to an end, this part of the world anyhow. Fiery shards of metal were jettisoned over the landscape. They came raining down on the forest, carrying the fire with them.

The blast put the air into motion, shock waves rode out into the woods and underbrush. Flaming debris kept coming out of the sky as though there were no end to it. Harry and Turk remained flattened out on the moss-strewn earth, waiting for the cataclysm to come to an end.

It did finally. Harry got up again. To his surprise, Turk showed signs of life. He no longer appeared to require Harry's aid. Using the trunk of a nearby pine to prop himself up, he brushed his trousers. But the dirt and pine needles and the blood, his own and other people's, wouldn't come off. His expression was one of great disgust. He was not a man to take indignities lightly, particularly when it meant getting shot down out of the sky.

Harry still couldn't decide how much pain he was suffering, and just what all this pain represented. He had an enormous headache and a feeling that something was about to become unplugged in his stomach and open up real soon. His legs harbored more pain, though only when he walked.

"Your tour has been a real education," he said to Turk.

Turk grimaced, whether at Harry's comment or at the pain he himself was feeling. Harry couldn't say.

"Where do you suppose we are?" Turk was looking around him, studying charred stumps of trees that the Sikorsky's crash had been responsible for.

"I thought geography was your department."

"It was from up there," Turk said ruefully, gesturing to the sky.

They began walking south which, Turk said, was the direction most likely to take them back to Russian River. And in fact, they could hear the river itself, cascading through a gorge below, although they had not gotten to a point where they could actually see it.

It was a difficult trek, made worse because of the two men's injuries. From time to time, Turk would halt and apologetically explain that he had to rest for a minute. He'd then slump down in whatever convenient place he found and remain there for a while, breathing heavily from his exertions. The blood had ceased flowing from the gash in his head, which was now a raw caking slit across his brow.

"You have any idea who would want to shoot us down?"

Turk shrugged. "Lots of people."

"But no one in particular?"

Turk didn't answer directly. All he said was: "As soon as I get back to town I am going to collect as many John Doe warrants that I can lay my hands on and assemble as many men as I can find and I am coming back here, this time to blow everything wide open. Now, you see, I have an excuse. Armed assault like this, the murder of four men, that's something people can understand. We're not talking about trafficking in illicit drugs, we're talking murder."

"You think an operation of the scale you're talking about is feasible?"

"Hell, I know it's feasible. I've been yearning to do something like this ever since I came to Russian River. Before today I never had the opportunity."

Harry sensed that, apart from the terror of being shot out of the sky

and the peril to his life, Turk welcomed the incident; it gave him publicity, it gave him his opening.

As Harry started to say something else to the nark, something caught his eye and he raised his head.

Turk noticed the fixity of his gaze. “What is it?” He looked up too. And quickly saw what it was.

Way high up in one of the trees, hung the outstretched body of Henry Beller, his chest speared by a long sharp branch that had stopped his fall.

CHAPTER

Four

"Then you don't look at it the way Turk does?"

Davenport vigorously shook his head. "Not at all. See, the problem with Turk is that he is so fanatic about wiping out the marijuana gardens that he can't see the forest for the trees. In this case. I mean that literally. He isn't particularly worried about who in hell shot down the chopper. Just like he told you, he's searching for a pretext. Now he's got one. I get the dirty work." He sighed. "I always get the dirty work."

Harry and Davenport were walking along Butterworth Street, which trailed off of Van Buren. The houses on this route were shabbier than those in the middle of town, attesting to advanced age and falling real-estate values. Some, however, were being restored, as Davenport was quick to point out. "Refugees from San Francisco and Eugene, places like that, come here, looking for peace and quiet."

"And dope."

"Of course, and dope."

But as the street narrowed and became rutted, less and less evidence of any kind of restoration, civic or private, could be seen. There were more tenements and structures that looked like they'd been fashioned entirely of corrugated tin and cardboard.

"This," declared Davenport, almost with perverse pride, "is Russian River's slum."

The street gave way altogether, becoming something less than a street but not quite a lot in which were clustered several miserable crammed structures. The sun glared harshly off their insubstantial metal roofs.

"And why have you taken me here?" Harry inquired.

"This is where most of our snitches live. I figured that one of them might have an idea who it was that shot down that chopper. You see, there are a great many people who rely on us, they pass us some information, we give them a few bucks, it helps them feed their habits. We know what they're doing. So does the sheriff's office. But there's just too much shit around to try and bust every single one of

them. Our jail isn't that big, in case you hadn't noticed."

"What does Turk think of this?"

"Turk's got his eyes on those hills. He doesn't give a goddamn about what goes on here in town."

"I imagine people don't take kindly to being seen with you even so."

Those few people Harry had observed in the vicinity in fact did not appear pleased to see either of them encroaching on what they believed was their turf. They had the depleted looks and the pallor of those who have dropped one tab of acid too many along the way.

"Well, ordinarily, that's the case," Davenport admitted. "But in something like this, with the helicopter, they know that we're not fooling around. Four counts of murder, destruction of government property, nobody does that kind of shit unless they're willing to take on the Feds. These people here, they're not up to a scam like that."

"So you're convinced they'll cooperate?"

"Convinced? Hell, I'm not convinced of shit, Callahan. But I think there's a reasonable chance we might pick up a few leads."

Two days had passed since the Sikorsky was downed over Rain Mountain. Turk was still laid up in the hospital where he was supposed to be undergoing further tests, specifically a CAT scan of the brain to determine whether he had sustained serious injury to his head. The D-Day invasion of marijuana country was going to have to be delayed a bit. Not that Turk wouldn't abandon his hospital bed if he could, but Wardell Marsh had sent someone to watch him, ostensibly to protect him in the event that those parties interested in his demise struck again. Marsh, of course, didn't like the way things were developing at all.

Davenport said, "Marsh realizes that as soon as Turk is back to normal, he'll take the whole case out of his hands and deal with it himself. You watch, he'll pull it off. It might not be successful, this little blitzkrieg of his, but hell, he'll make it happen. That's how Turk is."

In spite of Davenport's assessment of the slum dopers' mood, none of them proved particularly forthcoming. Davenport may have had an inflated idea of his capacity to acquire information.

Nobody knew a thing. They could not imagine who would have been so idiotic as to try to shoot down a helicopter carrying three detectives and a federal narcotics officer, they said. They were fearful of a giant bust in retaliation; accordingly, they were far more interested in obtaining Davenport's assurance that this wouldn't happen than in providing him with any useful leads.

They wanted Davenport to think that they could be counted on, however.

"You know me, Frank," they'd say, "you know how I've helped you in the past."

But Davenport was disheartened. "Either there's something going on that they truly don't know about, or else they are too scared to say what they do know."

As they were proceeding back toward Van Buren, Davenport stopped. He said, "You remember I told you that Turk had a girl?"

"I remember."

"She doesn't live so far from here. I was thinking you might go pay her a visit."

"And what good would that do?"

"I have my reservations about the woman, you understand. Turk thinks the world of her, but there's no telling how much he's told her."

"You're saying that she might be the leak?"

"Just supposing he mentioned the outing a couple of days ago, maybe in passing? She might have passed word on to certain friends. I'm not saying it's so. I'm saying maybe. Now for obvious reasons I can't question her. She'll only get right back to Turk on it, and it's my ass. You, you're from outside, you are working on an ongoing investigation. So what if she bitches to Turk. What's he going to do? And anyhow, the way I see it you two aren't exactly the best of friends. Am I right?"

Harry wasn't certain how much good seeing this woman would do, but he was willing to take a gamble. At the very least his curiosity was peaked. He couldn't imagine what Turk's girlfriend looked like. He wasn't expecting very much.

"What is her name and how do I find her?"

"Her name is Elsie Cranston and she lives right down that street over to your right, fourth house on the left."

"Anything pertinent I should know about her besides the attraction she exerts on Turk?"

"Well . . . ," Davenport wasn't quite sure how to put it. "Well, she does lots of drugs. That seems to be her profession and avocation as it were. I know, it doesn't make sense, what with Turk being a nark, but there it is. That's how they met. She was busted once along with several others, released with a fine and a reprimand as I recall. She wasn't carrying so they didn't want to press charges against her. But she was consorting with known dealers who were carrying. Turk liked

the looks of her. He figured he could straighten her out. You ask me, I honestly think that he believes he's done just that, straighten her out I mean. But take it from me she's not straight. I know straight, and she's not it."

This case is getting stranger by the minute, thought Harry as he began in the direction of Elsie Cranston's home, a rambling structure with pink paint and crumbling plaster.

The wooden stairs rattled loudly as Harry ascended them to the capacious porch.

Only a screen door guarded the entrance. Harry knocked. Hearing no response, he opened the screen door and walked in.

"Elsie? Hello?"

There seemed to be a great many rooms, each with furnishings that you might expect to find at a Salvation Army store. He wondered if she lived by herself.

From somewhere in the rear of the house there came the steamy odors of food cooking. There was also the sound of music, which grew louder and more identifiable the farther back Harry went. Linda Rondstadt was belting out her version of "Heatwave." An old song though not nearly as old as "Viper Mad."

Her back was turned to him. Obviously, she'd not heard him with the music so loud. She was either putting a pie into the oven or removing it.

Elsie was wearing a man's checkered shirt and jeans as faded as the walls of the kitchen. Her hair was concealed by a red kerchief. From Harry's vantage point, by the doorway to the kitchen, there was no way of determining whether her face was as intriguing as her body. But she did move nicely.

Perhaps the intensity of his stare was what alerted her. In any case, she turned, started, then studied Harry long and hard as though she were trying to place him in her mind.

Not beautiful but pretty, and probably not more than twenty-five, not at all what Harry had anticipated. Moreover, her skin had the color and texture that intimated at a life of health and regular hours. No matter what Davenport had said, she did not give one the impression that she relied heavily on drugs. But then Harry was skeptical enough not to dismiss Davenport's words out of hand.

"Who are you?"

He identified himself, displaying his credentials.

"Ah, you're one of those," Elsie said, making it sound like Harry had

just emerged from a leper's colony. "Turk told me they were bringing in cops from the south." She held out the pie which she'd just finished baking. "Apple-peach, are you interested?"

It struck Harry as odd that she reacted so impassively to his presence.

"I don't think so."

"You don't know what you want," she said. "I'll cut you a piece, and you can at least try it. Sit down. I'll put on some tea. Earl Gray all right with you? Or Thundercloud? Lots of caffeine in Thundercloud so don't take it if you're planning on a siesta this afternoon."

"Just water."

"I'll make you the Earl Gray. You look like you need the sleep too much." As she went about doing this she asked Harry if Turk had sent him. "He likes to check up on me. He calls me three or four times a day from the hospital. It's like he's jealous or something."

"That seems strange to you?"

She gave Harry a questioning look. "He should know better."

"No, Turk didn't send me. He might be upset if he knew I came as a matter of fact."

"Then it must be that clown he's got working for him, Davenport. Am I right? Don't answer. I know I'm right. Davenport suspects me of giving away all of Turk's secrets. Do I look to you like a femme fatale? Mata Hari of Russian River? Believe it or not I am an innocent. I really am."

"What do you do for a living?"

She gestured to the potholders she had hanging over the kitchen sink. "I make those. I do macramé. I do pottery. There's a kiln I use not far from here. You want to see it, I'll show you some time. I do a lot of things. Artsy-craftsy most of them. But all legal."

"No drugs?"

"A couple of joints now and then, no big deal. Generally I'm a good girl. Nothing stronger than Thundercloud."

"I thought it was Earl Gray."

"For you, Earl Gray. For me, Thundercloud. I suffer from narcolepsy. Fall asleep at the drop of a hat."

"Narcolepsy and not narcotics?" Harry realized that he didn't believe a word Elsie Cranston was telling him and, further, that he didn't mind.

She found this amusing and laughed. "That's right. Each to his

own."

"What do you and Turk talk about then?"

"Is that in the nature of a professional inquiry, sir?"

"Absolutely."

"We talk about what all young lovers talk about. Plans for the future that will never reach fruition, what he'll do when he's laid waste to all the marijuana fields, a beautiful life for the two of us in Washington. He hasn't gotten it through his head that I am not going to Washington with him. I am not marrying him. On the other hand, he's never going to lay waste to the marijuana fields either."

She leaned forward to pour out another cup of tea for Harry, but with such a pronounced motion that she succeeded in separating the opening of her shirt more than it already was. There was no break in her tan, it was even down to the rounded surfaces of her breasts.

"You know that for a fact?"

"Let's just say that I know Turk well enough to have an idea of his limitations. He's crazy, that one."

"Then why do you stay with him?"

"You have it wrong. I don't *stay* with him. He comes to see me, he calls me, he carries around this fantasy of me. But it's not what you'd call tight. Not on my end anyway. When it gets too cumbersome then —" She made a snipping motion with her fingers. "Then I cut him off."

"You're fairly ruthless for someone who says she's an innocent."

"That's me. A ruthless innocent. How do you like my pie?"

"Excellent. I'm impressed."

"What did I tell you? I am a woman of a thousand skills."

One of those skills might be deception Harry considered, upon leaving Elsie Cranston. But she was so ingenuous, so self-assured, that it was difficult to decipher the precise nature of the deception. He could see why Turk liked her. He could see why a great many men would like her. He could even see why he would like her if he allowed himself to.

He was walking. The town of Russian River could be traversed in half an hour. His car was parked back in front of the county courthouse.

In fact, walking, at least on the narrow side-streets, was the primary form of locomotion. A car, particularly one going in excess of fifty miles an hour, could excite some attention in these parts.

A dented pale green Chrysler that had one side window missing and fitted with cardboard to keep out the elements sputtered as it passed Harry, at the same time stirring up dust and pebbles from the potted roadbed.

It drew to a sudden stop directly in front of Elsie Cranston's house. Harry turned and watched. The driver of the Chrysler shortly emerged. Without looking in either direction, he advanced up the stairs to the porch and went right in.

Now what was he doing there? Harry wondered. Because Elsie Cranston's guest was none other than Mike Kilborn.

Kilborn wasn't at home. Home for Kilborn was a trailer van situated in a park designed expressly for such homes. His was a white bulbous-shaped thing crowned by a domelike formation with two symmetrical triangular windows up front; from a distance they looked like the eyes of some prehistoric creature that, had it wings, would long ago have taken to the air.

It was night, past ten but still prime time, and Harry could hear coming from the nearly two dozen vans sequestered in this place the sound of televisions in operation. What light there was originated mostly from various van windows. In providing this park, the town of Russian River seemed to have skimped on expenses for public illumination.

Kilborn had left the door open. Either he was coming right back or else he was a more trusting person than Harry had any reason to expect. Lights blazed in the interior. A Clash record was revolving endlessly on the turntable, stuck somewhere in the last cut. The sound system Kilborn possessed, Harry noted, was expensive. He even had a machine that measured the quality of the sound. He should take better care of his records, Harry thought, with all that good equipment.

The television was on too, although the audio was off. The screen projected a faltering image, one that kept going out of focus. The mountains interferred with the signal, Harry guessed. Hundreds of dollars for a good set and there were still the mountains to deal with.

By Kilborn's bedside was a clutter of porn magazines, as sleazy as the man who'd purchased them. There was nothing socially redeeming about any of them. The bed was unmade. An uncorked half-gallon jug of Gallo was on the floor within reach of the bed. To complete the impression of disarray, ashes and cigarette butts had been strewn about and then trampled on.

But the one thing that Harry would have expected was missing.

There was no evidence of dope. No pipes, no bongs, no roach clips. If there was a stash somewhere, Kilborn kept it well hidden. Not that Harry would necessarily do anything should he discover a stash, it was just that it might go far to substantiate Davenport's allegations. And he was hoping not for half an ounce of grass but something sizable and more felonious: cocaine or heroin, something that would indicate Kilborn was deeply involved in the business.

What Harry wanted was solid proof. It wasn't important that that proof implicate Kilborn or Davenport or Elsie Cranston or Turk. But it was important that it implicate someone. Up until now all he had to go on were contradictory stories with nothing to back them up.

The bullet came through the square window over Harry's right shoulder. It left nothing more than a few jagged fragments sitting in the frame; the rest of the glass was scattered about the room. The bullet created a hole over the bed and deposited a certain amount of chalklike debris on the unmade sheets.

Harry dropped down to the floor and waited. He heard nothing more. Very quickly, keeping low and well out of range of the windows, he proceeded toward the front of the van, which Kilborn had given over to functional purposes, situating the closets, head, and kitchen there.

It was possible that Kilborn himself had fired, preferring to take the intruder by surprise even if it meant destroying his own property. But it was equally possible that it was someone else who mistook Harry for the van's owner.

Maybe, Harry reasoned, this will all come clear if I open the front door and step out.

On the other hand, doing that could get him killed.

First, he doused all the lights in the front part of the van so that they wouldn't put him into relief when he stepped into the darkness outside. Then, extending his leg, he applied enough pressure on the door to get it open.

That was the easy part. What came next he wasn't particularly looking forward to.

CHAPTER

Five

Five small steps led up to the entrance of the van. Harry took those steps, going in the opposite direction, rolling down them. Then he stretched himself out, his Magnum gripped in both hands as he awaited an attack that, for the moment, failed to materialize.

He maneuvered himself to his knees, then drew fully erect. He listened but all he could hear were a dozen T.V. sets going and a restless chorus of crickets entertaining in the thicket.

Suddenly he was bathed in light. It was so intense that for an instant he could scarcely see.

"Raise your hands, mister!" someone cried. "This is the police."

The police, Harry was thinking, what a time for the police!

He hesitated, not altogether convinced that it was in fact the police. From his experience so far in Russian River, they were never so prompt to respond to an emergency call.

But within moments two uniformed men appeared, .38s drawn, their flashlights converging on Harry. Once again the order: "Drop it, mister, and raise those hands."

Harry saw no other choice but to comply.

The two cops approached Harry cautiously. One was young and obviously new to the job. Harry could tell just from the way he held his weapon. He didn't seem to know exactly what to do with it and might very well run in the opposite direction rather than have to fire at anybody.

His older companion, however, showed none of his insecurity. He was his opposite, big and corpulent. His walk was a swagger. He looked very much like a farmboy who'd grown up with animals he'd screw first before slaughtering. Harry guessed that he might transfer this behavioral pattern to human beings.

The older cop raised his flashlight so that the beam was directly in Harry's eyes. He scratched his double-chin and asked Harry what he was doing inside of Mike Kilborn's trailor.

"I am a police officer," said Harry patiently, knowing that this would not make the slightest impression on the man facing him.

“Brought up from San Francisco to investigate the killings of Jud Harris and Bonnie Nutting. You can ask your sheriff, Wardell Marsh, he’ll verify that for you.”

The fat cop slowly shook his head. “You haven’t answered my question.”

Harry tried to accommodate the man. “I was in the van conducting a search that was part of that investigation. If I may say so, I think you’d be better off trying to find out who took a shot at me in there.”

His interrogator didn’t appear interested in that aspect of the case. “You have a warrant?”

Harry owned that he did not.

“You should have had a warrant. This is the U.S. of A. You can’t go breaking into people’s homes with no warrant. We’re going to have to take you in.”

He said it as though that were something he deeply regretted, but Harry was not convinced.

The cop stooped over to recover Harry’s Magnum. He groaned. His vast weight made such movement a strain.

He liked the looks of the Magnum. “Some piece you’ve got here,” he said. He showed it to his nervous colleague. “Some piece, isn’t it? You grow up, son, you gonna have a piece like this.” He laughed. He thought maybe he’d cracked some kind of joke.

All the way back into the heart of Russian River, the cop kept talking. There was no way to shut him up. It was as though he’d hidden away millions of words in all his monstrous flesh and was trying to get rid of them as quickly as possible in hope of reducing weight.

But there was a focus to his rambling and it soon became very apparent.

“You cops coming from out of town, you think you can do the job better than us,” he was saying. “I’m telling you you’re full of shit. You don’t know the area, you don’t know the people. What the hell you going to accomplish anyway? You are fucking things up, son. You think because we’re homegrown boys we don’t know diddly-shit. You think you’re real clever. Well, let me tell you something, we’re going to show you how it is and send you back to the big city with buckshot in your tail, if you don’t watch out.”

So much, Harry thought, for the promises of cooperation that had been issued from Sheriff Marsh’s office.

Once the two cops reached the courthouse with their suspect, they

began to debate whether they should wake up the town's solitary judge and have him come down to arraign Harry. The fat one wanted to lock up Harry and let him stew in one of Russian River's four jail cells overnight while the younger one felt that something like professional courtesy ought to do—Harry was a detective on loan, after all—and that the judge could do with a little less sleep. As Harry suspected, the fat cop prevailed. The outcome had never really been in doubt.

Russian River's jail cells weren't terrible. They were relatively clean, with walls of white cinder blocks. But they were only intended as holding cells and, given the nature of the town's drug problem and the number of suspects arraigned and convicted, they had become hopelessly inadequate. While each was only supposed to accommodate one person, as many as four were crammed into them now. Two bunkbeds had replaced the single cot that had been there previously.

The cell Harry was assigned to, however, was home to only one other person, a young man with unruly hair and the dreamy look of someone who was only intermittently aware of his predicament.

The more sympathetic of the two arresting officers brought Harry a Styrofoam cup of coffee and a bologna sandwich wrapped in cellophane.

"It was the best that I could do," he said sheepishly. "Tomorrow someone will get you out of here, you'll see."

Harry said that he wasn't worried, that he could survive all right.

As soon as the young man in the cell realized that someone had joined him he immediately stirred, sitting up on his bunk. Harry had hoped he'd go right on sleeping, not being especially anxious to engage in conversation tonight.

"Hey, what did they get you for?" The young man was tapping his feet nervously, as if in time to music only he could hear. "You haven't got a cigarette, have you?"

When Harry said he didn't, the young man nodded as though he expected to be disappointed at every turn. "So what did you do, man?"

Harry said that he'd been arrested for jaywalking.

The young man's face registered very faint astonishment at this. "Shit, I didn't know they were cracking down so hard. But I'm not surprised. Ham wants to show everybody how fucking powerful he is. He was bad enough before but now with these outside cops showing up he's a lot worse."

"Ham?"

“The fat son of a bitch who brought you in, that’s Ham. Ham Kelso. His real name’s something like Bill but everyone calls him Ham.”

“I can see why.” Turk and Ham, Harry was thinking, this town goes in big for nicknames.

“You know, I’m related? Ham’s like my second cousin or some shit like that. The Reardons and the Kelsos have this blood thing going, but that doesn’t mean he won’t pull me in from time to time. He says he just wants to discipline me. Truth is the asshole hates my guts. He leaves my pa alone, and my uncle. Just me. He likes to pick on me is what it is. The name’s Tom Reardon by the way. Tom Reardon, Junior.” He stressed the last word.

“Harry.” That was all he said. Tom Jr. accepted it as enough, didn’t express an interest in what his last name might be or what he did for a living. Harry surmised that the only thing Tom Jr. was interested in was himself.

He asked Tom Jr. what crime, if crime it was, he had committed to arouse the ire of his second cousin Ham.

“I fucked around, you know,” he said ambiguously. “Somebody reported me. You know how it is?”

“Well, how exactly did you fuck around?”

“I hotwired some guy’s Mercury, no big deal. I would’ve brought it back.”

“Car theft. In some places they can put you away for quite a long time.”

“This isn’t some places.” Tom Jr. sounded practically indignant that Harry might think it was. “I told you it’s just because Ham has this thing for me. I spend a week here. Then they take me in front of that asshole judge they’ve got and he gives me this stupid lecture and my pa appears and he says, ‘Don’t you worry, the boy’ll watch himself next time,’ and he pays off a couple of people and that’s it.”

“That’s it? No probation?”

“Fuck probation. There ain’t any fucking probation, no record, no nothing. No sense paying everybody off if they kept my name on the books, would there be?”

“No, I guess not,” Harry agreed.

“ ’Cause it’s not just Ham we’re related to. We go way back, the Reardons, we’re related to every damn asshole in town. You think I get in trouble. You should see what my pa and Lou do. Lou, that’s my uncle.”

“Tell me, Tom, what do your father and uncle do?”

“Wish I could say but I can’t. You know how the Reardons get when somebody crosses them. Even one of their own.”

He made a slashing motion across his throat to emphasize the point.

“I see. Well, let me rephrase the question. What do they do for a living?”

“Oh well, they’re like farmers. We have some property at the base of Rain Mountain.”

“Rain Mountain?”

“You come from out of town, don’t you? You wouldn’t know it.”

“Don’t be too sure of that. Even outsiders learn fast in Russian River.”

The following morning, bright and much too early, Harry and Tom Jr. were awakened by the man who did double duty as warden and marshal of the court. “The judge is expecting you,” he said, addressing them both. “You got five minutes to get yourselves ready. The judge don’t like dallying.”

The judge might not have liked living from the looks of it. His skin was sallow, his eyes bloodshot, his hair sparse and white. His hands trembled, maybe from palsy, maybe from drink.

Aside from the judge and warden-marshal there were only three others in the courtroom at this hour: Ham Kelso and two disreputable specimens of humanity that Harry guessed to be members of the Reardon clan come to take possession of Tom Jr.

Harry would have expected someone other than Ham from the sheriff’s office. Maybe Davenport. But there was no one present who could provide him with support, moral or legal.

The judge was short on formalities. Adjusting his glasses, he peered down at the sheaf of papers in front of him and called out Harry’s name.

When Harry had duly identified himself, the judge asked him if he knew the charges against him.

Harry said he did not.

“The charges are breaking and entering and resisting arrest.”

“Now wait a minute, your honor, before these proceedings go any farther, I would like to be represented by a lawyer.”

The judge shook his head. “That won’t be necessary, Mr. Callahan. I have been informed that all charges have been dropped. Is that correct, Officer Kelso?”

Officer Kelso stood up to attest to the truth of this.

"Consequently, Mr. Callahan, you are at liberty. However, I have been instructed by Sheriff Marsh's office to inform you that you have embarrassed our local constabulary. With this in mind I must tell you that your advisory capacity in Russian River has been terminated. If you choose to remain here you can only do so in an unofficial capacity." He paused, removed his glasses, and allowed his badly bloodshot eyes to fix themselves on Harry. "However, I would recommend that you seriously consider returning home as soon as you can, Mr. Callahan. I understand that your superiors in the San Francisco Police Department have been told of your change of status."

Everything here is corrupt, Harry thought, everyone here is bought. Or crazed. Or both.

The judge asked Harry if he had anything to say.

Harry had things to say but not to this joker.

The judge banged his gavel. He seemed to like doing that, gave him the feeling that he actually mattered in the scheme of things.

"The next case, I believe, is Thomas Reardon, Jr. Will Mr. Reardon please rise?"

Harry was on his way out. He cast a sidelong glance at his former cellmate, but he had no intention of lingering in the courtroom to witness the mechanics of Tom Jr.'s fix. He had other, more pressing concerns.

Davenport arrived at the office before Turk. Harry was waiting for him.

"You're up early," Davenport noted, unlocking the door.

"That's what happens when you spend the night in jail."

Davenport seemed genuinely surprised to hear this.

"You mind explaining?"

"You were absolutely right. Kilborn does have some heavy protection."

They were in the windowless office. Harry was gratified that Davenport felt no need of putting a song like "Whacky Dust" on the turntable right away.

Davenport was still mystified. Harry proceeded to describe in some detail what had happened.

"It began with the Cranston woman," said Davenport. "It always begins with her."

“I don’t believe she set me up. She didn’t know that I was going out to Kilborn’s van.”

Davenport didn’t seem to be listening. Harry was beginning to think that Davenport had this thing about her. The thought crossed his mind that the man wanted Elsie for himself and resented the fact that Turk had gotten to her instead.

The narcotics officer was talking about something else entirely. “Turk’s coming out of the hospital today.”

“They found nothing wrong with his brain?”

“Nothing that would show up in a CAT scan anyway.”

“So I guess he’ll be getting on with his little invasion,” Harry said.

“Guess so. And you’ll certainly come along to watch the show. It should be something.”

“I told you. I am no longer here in an official capacity. Your excuse for a judge made that very clear.”

Davenport’s expression reflected the disdain he felt toward the judge. “You should try getting a warrant from that bastard. When we do our number up in the mountains, we’ll hit the circuit judge for our John Does. Plinth can be bought and sold. Like that.” He snapped his fingers. “Don’t pay attention to what he says. If there’s any problem with the sheriff’s office, Turk’ll straighten it out.”

“Turk?”

“Don’t you know? Since you saved his ass from that chopper he has nothing but praise for you. That shooting changed everything. He has his excuse to make a major bust, his brain seems to be reasonably intact, he feels like he’s got the world by the balls.”

“Four men were killed,” Harry reminded him.

“Hey, it’s regrettable. But I told you. Turk’s a fanatic. You don’t expect him to go into mourning, do you?”

Harry didn’t respond. Instead he said, “So you want me to stick around, is that what you re saying?”

“That’s right. There’s no problem.”

Harry nodded politely. He wished he could believe it. But from what he could see there were nothing but problems.

CHAPTER

Six

Poltergeists are the kind of ghosts you seldom see but one knows they're around all right. To make their presence known, they fling cups and saucers, knock books down from their shelves, make disturbing noises in the middle of the night, pull open windows and doors, and generally make life miserable for whomever it is they've chosen to haunt.

Mike Kilborn was something like a poltergeist in this respect. He was known to be around somewhere even when one couldn't exactly catch a glimpse of him. He gave off a certain vibration. At any moment, Harry expected to turn and find him standing there, his eyes barely discernible behind tinted shades, half a joint perched between his chapped lips.

He moved like a ghost too. Harry wouldn't have been greatly surprised to learn that he passed right through walls. He had a lithe, nimble body. He could get over and go under things that very few other mortals could. He'd be excellent as a second-story man or as a limbo dancer. But clearly his ambitions were of a much higher order.

When he materialized in the rearview mirror of Harry's car, pink glasses and pallid face, Harry was not so certain he wouldn't put a gun to his head and blow his brains out. This did not happen. Kilborn had only wanted to throw a scare into Harry by slipping into his locked car without leaving any evidence behind of the break-in.

They were outside the county courthouse. It looked just like a county courthouse should look at eight in the morning with the sun shining down on it: pristinely white and all-American.

"What did you do, slip in through the tailpipe?" Harry asked, not yet daring to turn around.

"That's not important. What is important is you skulking around my home last night."

"You ought to hire a maid, you know that. You are developing some very unsanitary habits."

"Didn't I tell you when you came here that if you wanted me you could always find me? You don't have to break into my van. The question is are you with me or are you against me? I told you I had

connections. You ought to regard me as a local resource, not those two clowns in there." He gestured toward the courthouse, where soon Turk and Davenport would begin plotting their excursion up into the mountains.

"Oh, I do. I do regard you as a local resource," Harry said.

"Then what was it you were looking for last night? You want to know something, you have only to ask."

"I would've asked. You just weren't at home."

"Man, I'm always around. You should've waited." He paused, then said, "You weren't looking for drugs, were you?"

"Now why should I do a thing like that?"

A sly grin took hold of Kilborn's lips. "Oh I don't know. Some people in this town think I'm heavy into drugs. I just hope you don't buy what they're selling. Well now, it looks like I got to be going. I just wanted to say good-bye. Understand you'll be leaving us pretty soon."

"I don't know about that," Harry said matter-of-factly. "I think I like it up in these parts. Very restful and bucolic, if you know what I mean."

There was silence from Kilborn. "That's not what I hear. I hear you're returning to San Francisco."

"Plans have a way of changing in Russian River."

"If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't stick around. I'm just telling you that as a friend."

"A friend," Harry repeated skeptically.

"But whatever you do, it's all the same to me."

Kilborn opened the door of the car. "Have a good day."

"No, thank you. I have other plans."

Kilborn didn't go too far. His decrepit Mercury was parked just a block up the road. Harry waited until he'd pulled away from his parking space and made a U-turn before starting up his own vehicle.

It looked as though Kilborn was heading out of town, south in the direction of San Francisco. Harry decided that it might behoove him to follow and see just where his destination lay.

Traffic picked up the closer they got to Highway 101, and it was possible, though Harry didn't believe it particularly likely, that Kilborn hadn't observed he was being tailed.

Kilborn was beginning to accelerate, exceeding by ten, then fifteen, then twenty miles the fifty-five mile-per-hour posted speed limit. To

keep up with him, Harry was compelled to do the same.

Suddenly, from off to the right, Harry heard the high-pitched whine of a police cruiser. A glance into his rearview mirror indicated that the cruiser was beginning to thread its way through the lanes of traffic. He had no doubt that he was the driver the trooper intended to stop, not Kilborn. He also had little doubt that he'd be stopped and delayed for several minutes while his credentials were checked, not because he had violated the speed limit—that part of it was incidental—but because it was necessary for Kilborn to escape him. Kilborn would have a police radio in his car, Harry surmised, and he'd obviously put it to good use.

The trooper was signaling Harry to pull over to the side. Harry had no intention and increased his acceleration.

So did the trooper.

The cruiser's siren shrieked more violently. Harry retaliated by depositing a red revolving light atop his own vehicle and triggering his own siren. Not that this would deter the trooper, but it might confuse him. Of course, Harry didn't want to go too fast or he might end up outdistancing Kilborn. That would defeat the whole purpose of this exercise.

That was his dilemma: to beat out the cruiser while remaining behind Kilborn. Harry had maybe three quarters of a mile, a mile at the most, in which to accomplish this.

Off to the right was a billboard proclaiming the turnoff to the Marietta Vinyards/Home of Claudio Finaud Wines and Meschino Champagnes.

Giving no hint of what he was about to do, Harry abruptly tore into the right lane, just barely avoiding a collision with a monstrous lumber truck, then shot down the off-ramp, still maintaining a speed of seventy miles per hour. The incessant wail of the siren behind him signaled that the cruiser was continuing its pursuit, though Harry's maneuver had caused it to lose ground.

This was just what Harry had expected.

A narrow two-lane road ran perpendicular to the off-ramp. One direction led to the Marietta Vinyards, where free samples awaited the thirsty traveler. The other led back to Highway 101. Harry hadn't much time to work with if he wanted to catch up with his quarry again.

He waited a few moments longer until he was certain the trooper had spotted him. Then he made a left turn, heading toward the on-ramp via an underpass.

The trooper naturally followed him, assuming that Harry meant to flee in the opposite direction on Highway 101, back toward Russian River.

Harry made a U-turn before he reached the on-ramp, forcing the trooper to slam on the brakes. Within moments, Harry was passing the cruiser, going the other way. He resisted the impulse to wave at his fuming pursuer.

He was heading back toward the off-ramp, but it made not the slightest difference. He started up it.

Three vehicles, including one log truck, were in the meantime starting down it. The drivers of these vehicles greeted the sight of Harry's car with a furious din of honking and a few angry curses shouted out of open windows.

Harry kept going.

The off-ramp was just wide enough to allow two vehicles to pass side-by-side—but only with a great many scraped fenders as a result. There was practically no leeway on either side.

The sound of steel against steel, chrome against chrome, hubcap against hubcap was more grating than the persistence of two police sirens shrieking in unison. Harry's car wobbled and listed as it fought the tide uphill. He kept having to balance it or risk overturning and plummeting oft the ramp.

The underside of the log truck was almost higher than the roof of Harry's car. Almost but not quite. A fearsomely loud thunderstorm sounded very close. But it was no thunderstorm, only the roof of Harry's car being sheared off with no more resistance than bandages stripped from a person's skin.

Some of the roof remained intact, but it wasn't enough to protect Harry in case of a genuine thunderstorm. It was a shadow of its former self, crumpled-in and torn half open, with flaps of it banging noisily with the car's unsteady motion.

But Harry had broken through and was now back on the highway, headed in the direction he wanted.

The state trooper had attempted to follow Harry's route, but by the time he was ready to speed up the off-ramp, three buffeted vehicles were stalled all over the ramp. One by one, the bewildered drivers were getting out to inspect the damage.

The trooper had no idea of what had happened and could not cut down his speed in time. He plowed directly into the Plymouth blocking his way. The driver of the Plymouth seemed to have realized what was going to happen as soon as he saw the cruiser's approach,

but there was nothing he, or anyone else, could do about it. He shrugged at the damage to his car.

The state trooper was not quite so fatalistic. His nose was bleeding, his eyes were blackened, an unsightly bruise was embossed on his brow. But his humiliation was worse than the injuries. He stood in the midst of the wreckage and swore. That was all he could do.

Harry didn't catch sight of Kilborn's car again until after passing signs indicating the turn-off to Napa. It seemed more and more likely he was heading into the San Francisco metropolitan area.

Although there was no mistaking Harry's car, given its devastated condition, no additional cruisers had turned out to give him chase. If Harry's luck held, Kilborn might still be under the impression that he had successfully eluded him.

That appeared to be the case, for Kilborn was proceeding at a speed close to the legal limit and making no outward move to take evasive action.

Like an arrow, Kilborn remained true to Highway 101, taking it past the airport into the city proper. He ended his journey in the vicinity of Fisherman's Wharf. He parked. Then, without troubling to lock the doors, he hastened down Beach Street. Harry, on foot now, was right behind him.

Harry followed Kilborn until he came at last to what looked like a residential building, one that had been designed to resemble an eighteenth-century Mexican villa, with white stucco walls and a colonnaded portico. Balconies on the upper floors were partially shrouded in intricate lattice-work, and the windows were arched. A set of stairs led up to a doorway where Harry found six doorbells, each with a name listed beside it.

Harry had seen Kilborn mount the stairs, but, from the distance he had necessarily had to maintain he hadn't been able to tell which of these half-dozen bells Kilborn had pressed. There was no question he'd pressed one of them; Harry had watched him wait until someone had buzzed him in.

He scanned the names, thinking that this was not likely to be very illuminating. But one name was very familiar. Jud Harris.

Could be a coincidence, Harry thought, but hardly. From the documentation he'd studied pertaining to the murder victims in marijuana country, he remembered seeing a reference to Harris owning property in San Francisco. No mention of what had happened to it had been made, though it was natural to assume that the

government or one of its agents had confiscated it. But which government? Which agent? And in any case, what involvement did Kilborn have with it?

While Harry didn't think that answers to these questions would be forthcoming any time soon, his curiosity kept him where he was. The afternoon wore on. Harry waited.

Eventually, his patience was rewarded. The door at the head of the stairs opened. First Kilborn, then a companion appeared.

Kilborn's friend was an older man with an air of importance about him. He was elegantly dressed and carrying an umbrella. There was no sign of rain, but maybe he knew something Harry didn't. His hair, what little of it remained to him, was going gray at the temples. His eyes were a strange blue color, like the sky at twilight. His lips were tight, as though it was an effort for him to resist smiling.

At the foot of the stairs he stopped and looked up the block. Almost instantaneously a limousine drew up alongside him. Turning to Kilborn, the man with the umbrella said a few words, shook his hand, then got into the waiting car.

Kilborn watched it drive off with a certain hopelessness, probably resentful that he too hadn't been invited for a ride in such a wonderful and expensive vehicle.

Harry was well out of sight, but Kilborn never once looked across the street. Instead, with a certain weariness to his step, he began to walk back to his car. He seemed to have all the time in the world, which led Harry to assume that his business in San Francisco was over.

Harry prepared to follow him mainly because there was no telling what trouble Kilborn could get himself in before the day was out.

Harry didn't get very far though. Just ahead of him a man in a cashmere coat was approaching. Across the street was another man, in a London Fog, and he was approaching too. Aside from the difference in their coats, the two men could have been twins. Both were in their mid-thirties, and both wore earnest expressions that attested to the seriousness of their purpose.

Their purpose, Harry quickly deduced, was him.

Their pace increased. The man facing him addressed him now.

"Drug Enforcement Agency," he said, holding up what Harry supposed must be his ID. It was difficult to know for certain at this distance. The other man in the London Fog didn't bother to bring his credentials into view. He held a gun instead, very discreetly so as not to alarm the passers-by on Beach Street who were oblivious to the

developing confrontation.

If these men truly were with the DEA, that meant big trouble. Extraordinary trouble even. This pair took their orders not from San Francisco, not from Sacramento, but Washington, D.C.

The two were drawing closer to him. They moved with some hesitancy, Harry noticed, probably because they knew Harry's reputation and were unsure how he was going to react. That was the one thing Harry had in common with them; he wasn't sure of them either.

Harry affected a nonchalant attitude at first. "I am afraid you've made some mistake. Far as I know I haven't violated any drug laws."

At the same time, he was thinking: This Kilborn character has unbelievable connections.

"That is not our determination to make," the first one said.

"Then why the gun?"

"It's just a precaution, Mr. Callahan. We want to be certain you will cooperate with us."

"That translates how?"

"We would like you to accompany us."

"You wouldn't want to tell me where, would you?"

The DEA officer shook his head.

"I didn't think so. Is there any charge against me? Specifically?"

"Obstructing a government investigation. Specifically."

"Obstructing an investigation. Now which investigation would that be?"

The gentlemen from the DEA were not disposed to going into detail. Harry had not expected they would be.

Judging the situation, Harry reasoned that he still had the advantage in spite of the fact that a gun was trained on him. It was unlikely that the man in the London Fog would fire it without extreme provocation. If someone wanted him killed he would not have chosen to arrange the execution in so public a forum. The murderers might be identified by witnesses.

And there would be witnesses. An entire tour group, in fact, was beginning to march down the block in the direction of Fisherman's Wharf. A garrulous pink-faced man in a brightly checkered jacket was leading the way, "Originally Fisherman's Wharf was known as Meigg's Wharf," he was saying in a loud voice, "but it derives its present name from all those fishermen who made their living from the Pacific. First

came the Genoese in their feluccas, then the Chinese shrimp catchers in their junks, next came the southern Italians and Sicilians . . .” And on he went.

It was obvious that the two dozen people trailing him were barely listening to his recitation. They were too busy conversing with one another.

“Our car is parked right across the street, Mr. Callahan,” the man in the cashmere coat said, his voice betraying not the slightest doubt that Harry would go along with them.

Harry waited several moments before responding. The two DEA officers were becoming restless. The man in the London Fog raised his .38 and extended it until it was nearly touching Harry’s chest.

“Time is awasting,” said his companion.

Harry was unconcerned about squandering their time. His eyes were focused on the advancing tourists. Most of them were in their twenties or thirties, he observed, flirtatious and excitable.

The two DEA men let their gazes shift in the direction Harry was looking so intently, maybe imagining that he was deliberately procrastinating until a confederate arrived to aid him. Little did they suspect that Harry looked upon the two dozen tourists as confederates.

Disregarding the gun thrust against his rib-cage, Harry strode forward. The man in the London Fog tried to grab him. Harry wheeled about so quickly that his hold, tentative to begin with, slipped altogether. His friend lunged forward, but Harry had already gotten past him. Neither of them had expected Harry might try to escape.

The man in cashmere brought out his weapon and sighted it on Harry who was only a few yards away. He commanded him to halt. Harry did not.

The tourist group seemed unaware of what was happening. But then one young man, more observant than his companions, caught a glimpse of the guns and was so incredulous that he just stopped where he was. He tapped the woman next to him on the shoulder to point out how bizarre things had gotten on Beach Street.

The tour guide was still talking a mile a minute, absolutely oblivious to the danger he and his group were about to walk into.

“These days the fishermen no longer go out looking for oysters and salmon and sardines. Basically, it’s crabs, but that’s still enough to keep approximately one hundred fishing boats in business.” He was turning back to see how engrossing he’d been when a woman screamed. Her scream ran through the crowd.

The tour guide’s jaw slackened. He couldn’t imagine what was

wrong. Had his lecture been so provocative that it had caused this kind of hysterical reaction? Before he could discover an explanation a shot rang out, although he did not immediately identify it as such.

Harry was zigzagging into the street, thinking all the time that these men from the DEA were crazy for risking fire in the middle of a crowded block. The first shot had gone above his head.

The second came closer, passing him on the right side.

The tour group was scattering in disarray, people running every which way or ducking under the nearest parked car, uncertain as to where the shots were originating.

The two DEA officers were crouched down, trying to keep Harry in their sights, which was becoming increasingly hard as he rushed into the panicked mob.

The tour leader stood right in the middle of the street. Either he hadn't caught on yet as to what was happening or he had become too immobilized with fear to get down. He was shouting directives to his group which went unheeded.

Harry slammed right into the man and knocked him down just as two more shots were fired.

"Stay there," he ordered the bewildered guide, "don't get up."

Harry, however, did not take his own advice. Immediately, he was up and running again. A car window off to his side shattered with the impact of another round.

Harry threw himself over the hood of that car and sprawled awkwardly on the other side, out of harm's way.

The two officers separated. One was headed directly for him, the other was circling around to his left, hoping to take him by surprise.

These men are goddamn desperate was Harry's only thought.

Police sirens howled in the distance, but Harry took no comfort in them. It was more likely that the San Francisco police—his presumed colleagues—would only assist the DEA agents in placing him under arrest, not the other way around. It would do him no good to say that he had not been responsible for initiating this battle.

Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed the man in the London Fog coming his way. It was no surprise. Harry fired his Magnum, careful not to hit him. Just keep him on his toes, force him back. Harry succeeded.

But by doing this he'd had to withdraw his attention from the agent in cashmere, who was nearly upon him. Harry had no opportunity to aim, only to fire in his general direction.

He'd not meant to hit him. The man had just been unlucky enough to get in the way. All at once the upper right shoulder of the cashmere glimmered bright red, and the man was reeling back. Then he fell and lay on the street, thrashing in pain.

The man in the London Fog seemed momentarily at a loss. From the shelter of a doorway he fired twice more, but the only thing he hit was the car Harry had concealed himself behind.

This section of Beach Street now resembled a battlefield on which large numbers lay dead. In fact, only one man had been wounded. The others—members of the tour group and hapless pedestrians caught in the crossfire—were prostrate and motionless only because they were afraid of drawing attention to themselves.

It was not until the police arrived that they dared to stand erect. The shooting was over. And Harry was gone.

CHAPTER

Seven

"Sid?"

"Who is this? Harry? How are you?"

"Getting along. Look, have you got a car you could lend me?"

Sid Kleinman was accustomed to getting requests from Harry, but usually they were calls for wire taps, antibugging equipment, warning systems, and ingenious two-wave radios. Those made sense; Sid was in the electronics business, after all. But a car? This was Harry's most pedestrian request but also the most surprising.

"I don't think that should be any problem. Any particular model?"

"Just something that runs and is liable to continue doing so in the near future."

"All right." Sid sounded a bit dubious. "Can I ask you what's wrong with the department that you can't get a car?"

"No, Sid, you can't ask. And I'd rather you wouldn't mention this to anybody."

"I understand. Well, stop by my store in an hour, and I'll have something ready for you."

A two-door 78 Olds, a Super 98, was waiting for Harry in front of Sid's store. It was painted bright blue, came with air conditioning and all sorts of nice optionals and ate up enough gasoline to keep Kuwait's oil industry going for another year.

Harry had been of two minds about returning to Russian River. Now, ironically, Russian River loomed as more of a sanctuary than his home base. The wounding of an officer of the Drug Enforcement Agency, an event that was announced every hour on the news Harry had tuned in on the car radio, was a crime serious enough to make him subject to arrest wherever he went in San Francisco. The only positive development that he could see was the omission of his name from those reports. The commentator said only "that the gunman is still being sought." Evidently, Harry's enemies preferred to find him on their own rather than instituting a general alarm.

Not that he was likely to be safe in Russian River. Safety wasn't what he was driving back up Highway 101 at eight in the evening for. No, what he intended to find were some answers—answers that would vindicate him.

By the light trickling from under the door, Harry could tell that Turk's office was occupied. He hesitated before knocking. It was conceivable that Turk and Davenport had been alerted that he was to be apprehended should he show himself. He was prepared to resist these narks just as he had the DEA agents if that should prove necessary.

It did not. Both Turk and Davenport were working late—it was nearly eleven by this time—plotting strategy. Maps had been unrolled and were dangling over desktops and hanging from the walls. What looked like hundreds of multicolored pins were scattered over this lavish display of regional geography. Some of the maps were from gas stations when gas stations still gave them away. Others were intricate topographical maps, compiled from satellite reconnaissance photos. Besides the pins, the maps were run through with crayoned lines and punctuated by numbers and letters that appeared to represent targets and strike zones. It all looked very impressive—on paper.

"Burning the midnight oil," said Turk, taking some liberty with the hour. "I've been trying to reach you all day. The woman at your motel told us you'd gone out and hadn't come back."

"I went for a sightseeing tour," Harry replied.

Turk frowned. He knew when something was being kept from him, but he continued on regardless. "Frank explained what your problem was. I've spoken with Wardell and it's all cleared up. It was just a little misunderstanding. You can stay on in an observational role." Gesturing to the topographical map directly in front of him, he said, "In fact, when we go up into the mountains I'll want you along. I figure you were good at getting out of them so it shouldn't be much problem getting back into them again."

"I appreciate your vote of confidence, Turk. But I seem to have encountered another small problem in the last few hours."

Turk resumed his dubious look. Davenport regarded him with some consternation.

"You got some knack for trouble, Callahan," noted Turk.

"It seems that way sometimes, I've got to admit."

"What is it this time?"

"I'm accused of shooting a DEA agent in San Francisco this afternoon." Harry saw no point in lying. One way or the other Turk

would find out. And probably sooner than later.

"Oh shit."

"Yes, that's about how I look at it."

"Did you do it?" Davenport asked, hoping, but not anticipating, a denial.

"The man sort of provoked me."

"I don't understand. Why the hell are you shooting at Feds?"

Turk was genuinely perplexed and undoubtedly was reconsidering the support he'd lent Harry.

"They were shooting at me. It was not by choice, I assure you."

When neither man said anything, Harry took it one step further: "I believe they were put on my case for one reason."

"You want to tell us what that was?" Turk was growing impatient.

"Mike Kilborn's ass. They seem to hold a high regard for it."

Harry decided to say nothing about Jud Harris' apartment. He was saving that intriguing shred of information for himself.

"What did I tell you, Harry?" Davenport grumbled with disgust. "Stay away from that scumbag."

"Oh, I intend to," Harry said, though without much conviction. "But my main concern is finding a place where I can hole up for a while. I expect that Danton's Motel Inn is not the most secure place I could be spending my nights from here on in."

"You have a point there," Turk said. "Let me think."

He dug three fingers into his beard. It was his way of thinking Harry guessed.

"All right," he announced after half a minute, "I've got it." He didn't say what "it" was. Instead he asked himself aloud why he was going to so much trouble for Harry.

Harry didn't remind him. Turk knew very well why he was doing this. He owed Harry his life.

Turning to Davenport, Turk told him to hold the fort which, given the nature of the operation he was planning, sounded like an appropriate phrase, and then he and Harry left the windowless office with the incongruously uptempo strains of Buck Washington doing "Save The Roach For Me" on the turntable.

Only when they were outside the courthouse did Turk consent to inform Harry the place he'd chosen for him to lay low for however long he had to. "It's not far from here, home of a good friend of mine,

you won't have any trouble at all. Just do me a favor and don't say a word about it to Frank. He and my friend don't get along so awfully well."

"Who is this friend of yours?" Harry thought he already knew the answer but wanted to be sure.

"Her name's Elsie Cranston. Her house is huge, and she lives by herself. There shouldn't be any problem finding a spare bedroom for you."

Maybe Turk wasn't as jealous as she'd made him sound. Maybe it was that he just didn't view Harry as a threat.

Harry did not know how far Turk's proffered hospitality would last once Elsie acknowledged that she'd made his acquaintance already. He might find himself sleeping in his Super 98 tonight.

"Maybe you ought to call her and clear it with her first. She ought to know what she's in for. Not everyone takes kindly to harboring a fugitive from justice, which is what my classification seems to be at the moment."

Turk scoffed at this. "I know her. There'll be no problem. All this mess will straighten itself out in a couple of days. I'll make some calls, you'll see . . ."

That was how Turk was. With his inflated notions of how much power he actually wielded, he believed that he could solve any problem, no matter how messy and dangerous, with a few phone calls, just as he had with the sheriff's office earlier that day.

"No, I wouldn't do that, Turk. Don't make any calls. You don't know who might be listening in. You can't be sure who is calling in whose debt. I'd appreciate it if you let me handle this."

Turk dimly perceived Harry's point. "As you wish. But trust me about Elsie. You'll never meet a woman more discreet."

Recalling Kilborn's visit to her the other afternoon, Harry wished he could be more convinced of that.

To his great relief, Elsie pretended to be meeting Harry for the first time. There'd been the vaguest hint of surprise when she'd seen Turk walk in with him, but it had quickly vanished and Turk had been none the wiser.

"To what do I owe this late-night visit?"

She was wearing a loose USC sweatshirt and slacks, and nothing on her feet. Her hair, auburn with a touch of blonde in it, draped her shoulders. The last time Harry had seen her, her hair had been hidden

in the folds of a kerchief. She looked different with it down, younger somehow, and Harry realized he might not have recognized her like this on the street.

Turk gave her the most perfunctory of kisses, maybe because he wished to maintain the fiction in front of Harry that they were only friends. Then he proceeded to explain Harry's predicament, careful to omit nearly all the particulars.

By the time he was through, he had told her only that Harry was a fellow police officer from San Francisco and that he was in "some difficulty" and required a place to stay for "a few days."

Elsie took no time to make her decision. "Third floor, first door on your right. I'll bring you up some blankets and fresh linen. You'll have to make your own bed though."

"I think I can manage that."

"And if you want breakfast you have to be up at seven. That's when I eat. Otherwise, you'll have to fend for yourself."

"If I can contribute something to the upkeep . . ." Harry began.

Turk refused for Elsie. "This is by way of a friendly gesture, Harry."

"On the other hand," Elsie said, qualifying this, "if a few days should stretch on . . ."

Turk dismissed this possibility. "No problem, honey, no problem. He'll be out of here as early as this Thursday night."

Why Thursday night? Harry wondered. Then he understood. Thursday night Turk expected him to be up in the mountains. The invasion must be scheduled for that morning.

"Well, we can work it out," Elsie said with a smile, rising from the table and putting an end to the discussion.

Turk took a look at his watch and announced that it was time he headed back to the office. "Not a minute to waste," he said as though to justify the need for a hasty departure.

Once he had left, Elsie did nothing but laugh for the next five minutes. Then she managed to compose herself.

"You gave a pretty good performance there," Harry remarked.

"You weren't so bad yourself."

She advanced to the cupboards above the sink. "Care for some Thunderbird tea?" she asked. "I was just going to have some myself."

The pot emitted a shrill whistle in confirmation.

"I thought you said it has a lot of caffeine in it"

“It does.” There was a mischievous look in her eyes.

“Well then, that would make sleep very difficult.”

“Who said anything about sleep?”

One leg rose high into the air until it was nearly perpendicular to the bed and there it remained until in a leisurely motion she brought it back down again. Then she repeated the movement with her right leg, extending and flexing it, then returning it to the flatness of the bed.

For a time, in the darkness of the room, that was all that Harry could see, just this monotonous hypnotic exercise of her legs.

Her legs were a dancer’s legs, sinuous and muscular. Her breasts were smaller than he would have imagined from the loose shirts he’d see her in, but they were perfectly formed. Her flesh was tawny, suggestive of an Indian heritage which she neither denied nor verified. Her brown eyes were especially lustrous in the absence of light, and they were fixed with unsettling intensity on him.

“I don’t think this is what Turk had in mind when he brought me over here.”

“I think you’re right.”

She was half-leaning over him, her breasts just touching his bruised flesh. With a finger she was tracing the scars that he’d amassed over the years, some quite recently. “You live a hard life,” she pronounced.

“It seems like it, doesn’t it?”

“To what purpose?”

“It passes the time.”

“Too glib. I don’t want easy answers.”

“Believe me, lady, one thing I don’t have is easy answers.”

He turned toward her, propping himself up with his elbow. “And what about you, do you have easy answers?”

“Depends.”

“On?”

“The questions.”

“Here’s a question.”

“OK.” She didn’t sound so very happy about the way the conversation was proceeding.

“Mike Kilborn.”

“Is that a question?”

“That is the granddaddy of questions.”

She was turning sullen, unwilling to be subject to an interrogation, and here in her bedroom of all places.

Rain was beginning to hammer down on the roof. For several moments as she considered her answer, considered *whether* to answer, that steady noisy tattoo was the only sound in the room.

“Don’t you ever quit?” she asked.

“No.”

“Mike Kilborn is a casual acquaintance of mine.”

“It seems that in this town Mike Kilborn is a casual acquaintance of just about everybody.”

“Turk wanted me to befriend him.”

“Turk? From what you told me, I thought Turk was a jealous maniac when it came to you.”

She leaned back. Now she was prone, her hands behind her head. Her eyes were directed at the ceiling though her mind seemed to be farther away than that.

“You don’t understand Turk. Actually, I don’t think you understand anyone here.”

That sounds about right, Harry thought.

She continued, “The most important thing for Turk, in case you haven’t figured it out yet, is cleaning out the marijuana business in this area. I told you before he’ll never do it. It’s an impossibility, though he’s not going to let that stop him. But he’s so obsessed about it that nothing else really matters to him. Not me, not Davenport, not anyone. He never thinks he’s using people, he does it so naturally. The way he brought you over here tonight, that was what he did with Mike.”

“Is this how Kilborn spent his nights?” Harry asked, his interest not entirely professional.

She looked hurt and angry. “I don’t have to answer that. I am not a whore. I do not like Mike. I put up with him as a favor to Turk. He believes that Mike is working both sides, using the police as a cover while he deals.”

“Is there any truth to that?”

“I don’t see where that’s any business of yours.”

“Let me rephrase the question. Are you getting the sort of information Turk wants from him?”

She shrugged. “Who knows what Turk finds useful and what’s just

bullshit. Do we have to continue this discussion?"

The rain was coming down harder. Harry had a picture of the wooded terrain that Turk's army would have to traverse and how muddy and impassable it was probably turning.

"One more question, then I'll let it go. Is there a possibility that it's been working the other way?"

"What do you mean?" Her voice was sharp.

"Let me finish. I mean could you have been taking information received from Turk and passing it on to Kilborn?"

"Oh no, you don't." Her eyes were inflamed. It had been bad enough before: a simmering fire had been building in her. The signs were all there—the tensed muscles, the shallow breathing. But now he had triggered her off. He hadn't wanted to, but he needed to get this out in the open. "Oh no, you don't," she repeated, suddenly springing out of bed, oblivious of her nudity.

She reached for the USC sweatshirt that she'd flung over a chair and gathered it over her. "Get out!" she commanded.

Harry did not instantly respond.

"Get the hell out of here! I am not going to be taken for a goddamn whore and then accused of betraying a friend. No way."

"It's kind of wet out there," Harry remarked, knowing that this would only make her more enraged.

She threw the sheets off the bed to encourage his speedy departure. "I don't give a shit if you drown out there. You have abused my hospitality. You have abused me."

Harry didn't move. He remained very calm, which was not easy under the circumstances. "You haven't answered my question. You answer my question, I'll leave."

"No!" She virtually screamed the reply. "No! No! No! I did not compromise Turk. I don't know what Turk's up to, I don't give a good goddamn. If there are any leaks, those leaks aren't coming from me. Those leaks are headed in the other direction."

"What do you mean by that?"

"What do I mean? I mean that the only people Turk completely trusts, the only people he will ever confide in, are his superiors."

"In Washington?"

"Sacramento, Washington, wherever, I don't know."

"Kilborn tell you that?"

"Kilborn doesn't tell me shit. But he implied as much. Now will you

leave?" She was still flushed and trembling, but most of her anger had been spent. She was tired, just tired.

Harry was beginning to perceive the connection: Turk was undermining himself every time he called Washington to let his office know what he was planning. Harry suspected that Washington then in turn alerted Kilborn and set him in motion. The question was why.

"Are you leaving?" Her voice intruded on his thoughts.

Yes, he said, yes, he was leaving. He pulled himself out of bed and dressed, conscious the whole time of her vigilant eyes. Though her rage had abated, she still looked like she might pounce on him, given the slightest provocation.

"I'm going, I'm going," he said, reassuring her.

She wore a doubtful look until he was all the way downstairs and at the door.

Not knowing what else to say he bade her good night.

"Good night," she said. It was like a retort. She tried slamming the door. The door didn't cooperate. It wasn't a door made for slamming. Too heavy.

Harry had left his borrowed Olds a block away. It was an ingrained habit never to park exactly in front of the place he was visiting. It appeared that the car was where he was going to spend his night after all.

He had made himself as comfortable as possible, squeezed into the back seat, his jacket doubling as his pillow, when he heard a rapping at the side window.

The problem in this town, he thought, was that no one lets you get a decent night's sleep.

Opening his eyes, he gazed blurrily at the window, which was so obscured by the rainwater collected on it that he could make out only the form of a person, not the features.

Pressing his face against the pane, he saw who it was.

It was Elsie, standing there, still wearing only the sweatshirt, getting very wet.

He unlocked the door to let her in. Her hair was so drenched that it was practically matted to her face. She brushed away enough strands so that her face was visible. "Come back."

Harry shook his head. "I was just getting comfortable in here," he said.

"You don't understand. I blew up. There wasn't any reason to fly off

the handle like that. I apologize."

"I don't want your apologies."

"What do you want?"

He grabbed hold of her and pulled her wet chilled body down onto the seat with him, shutting the door at the same time.

"I want you," he answered her. "I want you."

The exact timing of the invasion might have been a secret, but the preparations for it certainly weren't. Russian River was a small place and there was simply no way to conceal from view the small army of police officers, deputized volunteers, and federal agents that was assembling both in front of the county-seat courthouse and inside state police headquarters located fifteen miles south of town. Nor could even the most unobservant individual fail to note the growing armada of half-tracks, four-wheel-drives, jeeps, and logging trucks reconditioned to serve as troop transport. In addition, two new Sikorskys had been brought in to replace the one shot down over Rain Mountain. Throughout Wednesday afternoon they sat under guard on the grounds of a public park ordinarily used by children on sunnier days.

Arms from all over the state, mainly M161As and AR15s, were being collected in the armory belonging to the state police. They were to be distributed to the men just prior to the launching of the invasion.

Overhead, as the afternoon went on, it was possible to hear the faint drone of the spotter plane as the pilot made his final reconnaissance flights over the region.

In the town's two restaurants and two bars, agents and detectives and people who'd been deputized twenty-four hours before traded stories and speculations about the day and hour of the invasion strike. Everyone reckoned that it would have to be soon. If there was any delay, they'd move into the mountains and find all the growers had split—along with their harvests.

Rut there were others who pointed out that the weather was so dismal, with intermittent rain and overcast skies, that the strike would have to be postponed. Otherwise, the entire force would simply get bogged down.

In the courthouse, the federal circuit court judge was approving successive John Doe warrants as fast as he could. Periodically, he would take a break and go for meditative walks in the rain.

The preparations for such an enterprise were so enormous that the work had spilled out of the windowless office Turk and Davenport were accustomed to. Tables with more maps and enlarged photographs lined the corridors, and offices that were regularly given over to routine civic functions had been appropriated by a variety of federal, state, and local authorities.

It was difficult for Harry to tell whether Turk was really in charge of this or that he thus far had just not run up against anyone to countermand his instructions because of the general confusion.

In any event, he was more exhilarated than Harry could ever recall seeing him. That he'd barely slept made no difference; the adrenalin flowed in his veins and his eyes were alight with the anticipation of finally having his dream fulfilled.

He was constantly briefing people, handing out orders and advice, always with enthusiasm. He sounded giddy when he spoke, like a child who has been set loose in a candy store a little too long.

Spotting Harry, he rushed over to him. "I'm glad you could join us."

"Oh, I'm just keeping to the shadows and watching."

In this chaos, it was not hard to maintain a low profile.

"Good enough. I hope you'll be joining us up in the mountains. Even if you are no longer acting in an official capacity."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"That's what I like to hear." Turk offered Harry a broad, meaningless smile.

"But there's one thing that concerns me."

"What's that?" Clearly Turk did not want to hear anything that would disrupt the inexorable progress of his invasion plans.

"The whole goddamn town knows you're going tomorrow morning."

Turk's smile wasn't so meaningless this time. "Is that so?"

"That's what they're saying in the gin mills. It's a good bet that's what they're saying up in the mountains."

"Ah, that is exactly how I want it. That is perfect." He lowered his voice, glanced around to see if anyone was nearby. "You see I made sure that that rumor was spread." He paused, then clarified his purpose: "Confuse the enemy."

"Confuse the friend too?"

"That's the only way. The truth is we're moving out tonight. Six o'clock sharp."

"Weather report says it's supposed to rain hard tonight. Might make

it kind of messy, if you know what I mean."

"If I worried about the weather, I'd have to wait till spring. The hell with the weather."

Then Turk turned and went back to his beloved topographical maps.

The weather might be easy for him to dismiss now, Harry thought, but it would prove more difficult to ignore once they all got out into it.

Harry wandered about town for the next hour and a half, watching the action with more than a little amusement. In spite of all the commotion, it did not appear as though very much was actually being accomplished.

Towards three-thirty in the afternoon a chauffeur-driven Mercedes sped up Van Buren and double-parked in front of the courthouse. Harry stopped where he was and waited.

Suddenly, two local police officers emerged from the courthouse, followed by Turk.

The passenger in the Mercedes got out and waited until Turk approached him. The two greeted each other and shook hands.

Harry was familiar with the visitor. It was the same man he had seen yesterday in San Francisco with Kilborn. He had on the same coat, and he was still carrying his umbrella. This time the umbrella made sense.

Harry found Davenport a few minutes later and asked him who this distinguished arrival was.

"Howard McPheeters."

"Am I supposed to know the name?"

"He's top brass from Washington. Our superior officer. He's come to take charge of the operation. I thought you knew that."

"No," said Harry, wondering at the connection. "Nobody tells me anything."

CHAPTER

Eight

By the time the invasion force pulled out—forty-five minutes late—the weather was even worse than it had been that afternoon. When there wasn't a drizzle, there was a downpour. The helicopters and the spotter plane would have to remain grounded at least until the next day.

Turk was undaunted. He rode in one of the four-wheel-drive pickups that contained several transmitters. He used them to communicate with the other units that composed this unlikely caravan. Turk wanted Harry to ride with him. He seemed anxious to demonstrate to his guest that he was not the blundering ass he might have been mistaken for originally. "Besides," he said, "I'd thought you'd like another chance at Charlie Mountain. Maybe we can get those cocksuckers who shot us down."

Harry wasn't certain that another chance at Charlie—Rain Mountain in the geography books—was exactly what he had in mind. But he knew this exercise couldn't fail to be interesting, whatever the result. He had learned that McPheeters was far away, back at the courthouse where he was supposed to be, coordinating the movements of the strike force.

"What do you know about this McPheeters?" Harry asked.

"Howard? He's reliable, very efficient, a formidable personality," Turk said, sounding very sure of himself. "Why do you ask?"

"I wouldn't trust the man."

Turk was brought up short. One of the transmitters had come to life. It was Davenport, who was in command of the units moving in the direction of Alpha Mountain.

"Excuse me," he said to Harry, then lifted up the speaker. "This is Xanadu One. What is it, Frank?"

"We have a stall. A truck is trapped in the mud."

"Well, get it untrapped."

"We're doing our best, Turk. There's a man coming up from town to free it."

"Can you go around it meanwhile?"

“That’s the thing, Turk. It was one of the lead trucks. And you know how the road is, especially with this goddamn rain coming down. We’re just going to have to wait here for a while.”

“How long is a while?”

“As soon as the guy from Maxie’s Garage gets here. Half an hour, I don’t know. Maybe forty-five minutes.”

“Shit. All right, do the best you can.”

Already, twenty minutes out, Turk’s elaborately contrived two-pronged advance, directed at Lunar and Rain mountains, thought to be the two likeliest redoubts of the marijuana business, had become bogged down in the mud.

Harry felt it poetic justice that an operation requiring millions of dollars and sixty men armed to the teeth should have to rely on a mechanic from Maxie’s Garage to get underway.

Turk was so furious over the delay that Harry decided not to antagonize him with such a gratuitous comment. Instead, as delicately as possible, he asked him if McPheeters had concurred in the scheduling of the invasion.

“No objection at all. We were perfectly in accord. I don’t know why you say I shouldn’t trust him. I’ve worked under him for years.”

Turk clearly was not about to allow anything to interfere with the consummation of his dream. No matter what Harry said, the only voice he was ever going to listen to was his own.

But Harry was fast coming to the inescapable conclusion that the only reason McPheeters might condone Turk’s scheme, however wild or preposterous, would be to ensure its failure.

The transmitter crackled again. It was a federal marshal who wished to know whether the strike against Charlie Mountain should be put off until the truck in the second column was extricated from the mud so that the two columns might attack simultaneously. Turk informed him that he was putting off nothing.

From the air—if the weather had allowed anyone to fly up into it—the two columns, the one advancing, the other mired in the treacherous terrain, resembled twin snakes on diverging roads. Each column consisted of maybe ten or twelve vehicles of one sort or another. When they were all in motion the clouds of exhaust fumes that they collectively produced made for a noxious and murky atmosphere.

And where was the man from Maxie’s Garage? An hour had gone by, and he had not arrived. Davenport’s eradication team, as the invasion organizers called it, remained where it was, motionless in the

shadow of Lunar Mountain. The rain storm was growing worse. Thunder rumbled north and west of the mountains, greenish-white flashes ignited the sky, giving the whole landscape a vaguely sinister, phosphorescent look.

In the green rusted pickup in which Harry and Turk were installed, the radio receivers were filled with voices, some of them recognizable to Harry, others unfamiliar. All sought guidance from Turk. The reports were of more rain through the night. The roads, never in the best of condition, would be inhospitable to a Sherman tank, were such a thing available to the eradication forces.

Again and again came pleas to pause for the night, to establish a base camp, draw the trucks and half-tracks around wagon-train fashion, and wait for the storm to blow over.

The more plaintive these requests got, the more heated Turk became in opposition. “That’s playing into their hands,” he would say, referring to the growers who resided deep in the heart of the muddy county. “To delay tonight would be to sacrifice the element of surprise.”

We’re going to surprise ourselves, Harry thought but said nothing. No, Turk was too far gone. He was absolutely committed to this venture. But if hell couldn’t impede his progress high water just might.

Another man counseled putting off the ascent on Charlie at least for a few hours. “Maybe it’ll clear enough to send up the spotter,” he said tentatively. “With infrared photography we should be able to gauge our bearings more accurately.”

Turk wouldn’t consider this suggestion either. “We have all the data we need,” he said. Turning to Harry, he said with evident disdain, “Last-minute jitters. Once we start, once we make our first bust, then you’ll see.”

See what? Harry wondered. But again he knew enough to remain silent.

Turk attempted to contact Davenport. “Domino One, this is Xanadu One. What’s happening there?”

“We’ve got someone working on the truck right now. Just got here.”

“How long do you think it’ll take?”

“The mechanic they sent out here isn’t sure. He wants to try himself, but it seems to be a bigger job than he expected. He might have to go back into town for more equipment.”

“Damn. Well, you do the best you can. We’re moving right along here.”

And they were moving right along, surprisingly enough, in spite of the oozy earth. At times the paved surface of the road could not be seen, there was so much mud strewn over it. And visibility was nearly zero, compelling Turk's column to slow down to fifteen miles an hour maximum.

But little by little the gradient of the road became more pronounced. The column was at last proceeding up into Rain Mountain. Yet there was scarcely reason for optimism; this was the easiest part of the journey. Soon the road that had led them out of Russian River would disappear, replaced—if the maps could be relied upon—by a network of smaller unpaved roads that on paper looked like so many broken veins in the nose of an alcoholic.

It was more thickly wooded here, dense with brush and tendril. The ground was cluttered with rocks and overtaken by moss. The most frequent sound, aside from the steady attack of the rain, was the squeal of tires fighting against the slippery surface, gnashing spokes, mud, and stone until purchase was obtained.

But they continued to make progress, which was more than could be said of Davenport's column. That one hadn't moved since early that evening and, given the latest information, wasn't likely to any time soon.

It was nearly eight o'clock. The atmosphere was rain and dark, dark and rain, nothing else. The neighboring trees rose like ghosts in the high-intensity headlight beams. Dinner was a few sandwiches and soda packed earlier by one of Russian River's restaurants.

"We should be reaching the turn-off right about now," Turk said, laying his road map flush against the steering wheel.

And within five minutes his judgment proved to be correct. There, caught in the headlights, was the juncture at which the main road came to an end and divided into two.

And positioned squat in the middle of the juncture was an abandoned school bus, more rust than yellow, with all the glass gone from the windows.

With an oath Turk brought his truck to a halt and radioed back that the other drivers do similarly. The last thing he needed right now was for a pileup to develop because someone applied the brakes too late.

For half a minute Turk sat in stony silence, staring at the obstacle in his path.

"Well, what do you think we ought to do? Try and ram it out of the way or see if we can get enough men to push it off the road?"

"Let's take a look first," Harry advised.

And so they got out of the truck and walked over to where the bus rested. The rain soaked them within moments. The two men examined the way the bus was laid across the road. One pair of tires rested on asphalt, the other on mud which meant that the bus was slowly sinking in the rear.

"Hell, let's ram it," Turk said, too impatient to contemplate any other course of action.

"Whatever you say," Harry declared. "It's your show."

The bus didn't like being moved. Turk aimed his pickup as if it were some kind of guided missile, and he took it, at twenty-five miles an hour, dead center into the derelict school bus. The school bus shuddered in reaction, the truck shuddered, but that was all.

"Once more!" said Turk.

This time he took the truck in at a higher speed. Harry dreaded to think what the result of this collision might be and kept his head down.

The truck slammed into the bus from another angle, closer to the front, and managed to jar it loose, forcing it farther back into the mud.

"I think if we got out and pushed," Harry said, "we could do it."

Several reluctant volunteers, who vastly preferred the shelter of their vehicles, were recruited. Together they strained and slipped and lost their grip again and again because of the wetness. The bus finally gave way and coasted gently into the mud, freeing access to the narrow road that would take them to their first destination, a marijuana farm said to be owned by a man named Harlow Gentry.

Turk, consulting his map again, stated that the Gentry farm was located only three miles down this secondary road. It was now a quarter to nine. Dislodging the bus had exhausted nearly an hour of their time.

No further impediment stood in their way, and the next three miles, along a torturous and sometimes nonexistent road, were conquered without incident. Off to their right lay a grassy expanse and a white structure on the crest of a faraway hill that Harry guessed was where Gentry kept his home and his marijuana.

"This is Xanadu One," Turk said, speaking into his receiver. "We are at Mark One. Repeat: We are at Charlie Mark One. Prepare for strike."

One by one the vehicles stopped. The men began to emerge, their weapons in hand, their heads wrapped in folds of raincoats or covered by hardhats that glimmered in the lights of their trucks.

"What do you know about Gentry?" Harry inquired.

“Nothing,” said Turk, “except that he lives here and grows rich dealing in weed.”

Whatever else Gentry did or did not do was unclear because his house was empty. The lights were off but not because he had gone to sleep early. He just wasn’t in. Harry inspected the bathroom. Opening the medicine chest, he was confirmed in his hypothesis.

He went downstairs and found Turk and two other law enforcement officials rummaging through the closets and bureaus, searching for evidence that might implicate the absent occupant.

“He’s split for a while,” Harry said. “Medicine chest’s empty.” When Turk didn’t seem to comprehend what he was saying, he added, “So much for surprise.”

Turk didn’t seem particularly dismayed, however. “That’s only one. You can’t tell. It could be just coincidence. Let’s see what our men have come up with in the fields.”

But there was little there that made Turk happy. There was marijuana all right but not very much of it. The vast majority of the plants appeared to have already been harvested, most likely for the shake weed—droppings from the lower portions of the plants—that was culled at this time of year.

Turk looked glum, no longer so confident that this was coincidence and nothing else.

Twenty pounds of mediocre grass was hardly much of a reward after going to all this effort. Especially when the grower himself had slipped away.

Nonetheless, it was obviously too late to think of turning back now even though Harry suspected that they would find only more of the same as they continued their half-assed odyssey up higher on Rain Mountain.

“Next farm’s another five miles up the road,” Turk noted. And they were on their way.

The road was more pitted along this stretch. Its many small gulleys and niches had quickly filled with water. Driving up it was something like driving through a swollen river. Water slapped against their windows, mocking the frantic attempts of the windshield wipers to restore any sort of visibility.

Just ahead of them, scarcely two miles from the Gentry farm, they heard a huge thunk.

“What was that?”

Harry didn’t know. But he counseled Turk to slow down quickly.

No sooner had he said this than there was a second disturbance, just as loud and ominous.

“A tree,” Harry said. “They’re felling trees to block our way.”

Turk peered into the distance, but there was just the rainy gloom. He did not have any reason to think Harry was wrong so he radioed back to his men and ordered another halt.

“I guess we ought to go out and take a look.”

They did exactly that. It was treacherous walking, and soon they were up to their knees in viscous water. Only after slogging for what seemed a considerable period of time did they come upon the new barriers.

The two downed trees were huge, with thick massive trunks that would require several men to move. Tied to the stumps Harry found strands of rope that had just been cut.

“There’s no doubt now that they’ve been expecting us,” Harry said.

He gazed out into the darkness, wondering just where they might be and what other ideas they had in mind.

“Fuck them,” Turk muttered. “We’ll move out on foot.”

In spite of Turk’s resolve, he recognized the need to get McPheeters’ opinion before continuing ahead without vehicles. Harry thought that surely McPheeters would refuse to sanction the abandonment of the trucks, but again he was surprised.

In a voice that was astonishingly genial, the voice of a radio talk-show host, McPheeters said, “Listen, Turk, you’re in the field, you have enough experience to judge the situation up there for yourself. If you think it makes sense to march out, by all means you certainly have my approval.”

Harry was more convinced than ever that McPheeters, for whatever reason, dearly wanted this operation to fail. And Turk, who wanted the exact opposite, was clearly doing more to advance that objective than the most devious saboteur could possibly do.

The thirty-two men who had come along with this column were understandably loath to expose themselves to the drenching rain without any hope of returning to shelter for some hours to come. But they were under orders and wearily they adjusted their raingear, came out of their trucks, and clambered over the felled trees. Looking more like Napoleon’s army on its retreat from Russia than any kind of strike force, they followed Turk’s lead to Mark Two, a farm owned by Jason Milandra.

CHAPTER

Nine

For a while the rain subsided, fading to a constant drizzle. The humidity must have been close to a hundred percent. A thick fog was settling over the rise, making it difficult to see anything more than a yard or two in advance. No one was speaking, being too absorbed by the task of putting one foot in front of the other.

It was possible that the eradication team would stumble on the Milandra farm before they caught a glimpse of it.

Turk was still in the lead. All at once Harry heard him groan and double over. He ran to his side.

A series of chains had been strung across the road, and Turk had simply blundered into one. He was clutching his stomach and doing his utmost not to scream aloud.

The chains did not provide a formidable obstacle to men on foot and when Turk recovered enough, he order them severed. No one had an opportunity to carry out his instruction. At that instant several automatics opened up.

But the initial barrage did not come from the opposite side of the chains where the defenders could be expected to be dug in. The fire was originating from a point in back of them, and it was directed over their heads.

Turk wheeled around in confusion. “Who gave orders to shoot?” he yelled.

There was now fire from the opposite direction in answer to the first eruption.

They seemed to be trapped in a crossfire. The members of the eradication team appeared destined to be eradicated themselves if they did not take prompt and decisive action. Most of the men simply flung themselves into the muddy water. Others scattered off to the sides, seeking protection behind nearby trees that were rapidly becoming pockmarked with automatic fire.

Turk was still standing, trying to get a fix on the situation. Harry pulled him down.

At this point Harry realized that the fire was coming from only one

direction—from directly in front of them. Whoever had discharged the first shots had abruptly broken off. There was no telling who was responsible or why. They now had to concentrate on the people who were still shooting at them.

"Open fire!" Turk commanded.

Harry did not see how this was going to do much good. All they could make out were successive blades of fire in the fog, giving them little in the way of targets. But the men complied with a fusillade from the M161As and AR15s they had with them.

Their retaliatory fire only invited a more heated response. An exchange continued for several minutes to no effect whatsoever. No one on either side had any idea where their shots were going. The defenders were just keeping the strike force pinned down.

Turk was completely baffled. "Nothing like this has ever happened before. One grower might put up resistance, yes, but to risk shooting on federal agents like this. I don't understand it."

"They didn't show any hesitation about shooting down our helicopter," Harry reminded him.

The shooting grew more desultory on both sides. Finally, Turk recognized the futility of maintaining the status quo and ordered a ceasefire.

Soon silence prevailed. It was impossible to know whether the defenders were merely waiting for the next round or whether they had slipped away in the fog.

"Turk, the best thing for you to do is retreat, go back to the trucks, and wait until tomorrow morning. No good is going to come of this."

"Quiet. I'm thinking." Turk wasn't inclined to listen to anyone's advice, however well reasoned.

He consulted his map again. "We can go around," he announced. "We can circle around and hit them from the rear."

"You don't even know where the hell they are."

Turk wasn't listening. He'd made up his mind. Beginning to move about among his men, he alerted the squadron leaders to the strategy he'd just improvised.

Harry thus far had adhered to his role as observer. He had drawn out his .44 but had withheld his fire. But the way things were developing, he had a notion that he would be forced to employ it within the immediate future.

Half a dozen men of the eradication team, shadowy forms in the dark, raised themselves from the water where they'd been sprawled

out and began to race forward.

They were heading onto an embankment off to the right of the road. Soon they were lost to sight.

A minute passed. Then there was a rapid series of shots followed by terrifying screams. More shots.

Turk looked into Harry's face as though he expected to find the answer to his unspoken question.

Harry had no answer. He was waiting like everybody else.

There was silence. Then two men appeared. Both were running fast. "They're killing us!" one of them shouted. He staggered toward Turk, looking as though he wanted to explain exactly what he meant. But then he stopped and looked around with dull unseeing eyes.

Turk approached him but the man failed to notice. He pitched forward, a big bloody hole under his right shoulder.

It took no time at all for word to filter through the ranks that five men had suffered critical injuries in an exchange of fire that could have lasted no longer than twenty seconds. Disgruntled enough already, the men openly began to talk of calling the entire operation off, defying Turk if necessary.

"There still may be men alive out there," Harry said, "we can't let them stay there."

Turk seemed to have forgotten all about them. "What do you suggest we do?" he asked angrily, as though this fiasco was Harry's fault, not his. "They'll kill anyone who goes in there to recover them."

"Not if we distract them."

"Distract them?"

"Feign an attack on this front. I'll go around and see if there are any survivors."

"Alone?"

"If someone wants to volunteer his services, that's all right with me."

Turk was mulling this over.

"I don't know," he said.

"We haven't much time. If there are any survivors out there, we might have to evacuate them quickly. Why don't you radio back to Russian River and alert them that emergency medical aid should be ready?"

"Yes, you're right, that's exactly what I should do." Turk did nothing, however. This whole business seemed to have overwhelmed

him. He had drawn up no contingency plans, plotted no scenarios other than those that coincided with his perfectly imagined one.

"I am going to start out now. All right?"

Harry felt as though he were addressing a child, and a not particularly bright child at that. Turk looked at him with empty eyes and slowly nodded. "Yes, all right."

Still uncertain, Harry left him. He then circulated among the beleaguered men to announce his intentions. To his surprise, he had little difficulty in enlisting three deputized volunteers to accompany him. It wasn't the danger that concerned them so much, it was the man who was leading them. Harry was one thing, Turk quite another. They didn't even know who Harry was, but at least he gave the impression that he knew what he was doing.

They moved out quietly, plunging into the woods where the ground constantly gave way beneath their feet and the air was filled with the scent of moss and decay. Sometimes there was so much mud that they sank nearly to their waists in it. The earth seemed hungry, ready at any moment to suck them in.

Harry kept listening for the sound of gunfire that would signal Turk's diversionary attack. But he heard nothing. Was Turk so paralyzed that he could no longer dispense orders? Or had he forgotten the plan that they had only minutes before agreed upon? Anything was possible with Turk. He really wasn't a well man.

Then, to Harry's relief, the diversion came. But it was louder than he anticipated, a raucous and explosive affair that lit up the darkness with the sudden intensity of an electric storm.

One of the men with Harry paused for a moment and, observing the noisy spectacle, declared in amazement that now he would never have to rely just on old movies when he wanted to know what war was like.

Something was wrong. Harry couldn't at first determine what it was. Then he understood. The battle was moving. The opposing forces weren't retaining their positions as they'd been doing up until now but were coming closer together.

There was certainly no time to consider the implications of this. Harry had his own mission to attend to. They could not have much farther to go. The ambush had occurred only minutes after the six men had ventured into the woods.

They did find the four men who hadn't returned but none of them was alive. If they hadn't died immediately as a result of their wounds, then they had succumbed very shortly afterward. And it was possible that it wasn't the bullets that had killed all of them. Some might have

suffocated in the mud into which they'd fallen. They located a leg sticking up from the thick gooey blackness; they found a hand protruding from the muck. When they extricated the body and wiped the face clean, they looked into eyes filled with horror.

At first they could only discover three corpses. One of the deputies resorted to a flashlight to aid him in the search for the fourth. This was a mistake. His beam disclosed the fourth body, but it also signaled their presence to their enemies.

Two shotguns opened up but with so much gunfire that it was difficult to distinguish them. One of the deputies made a retching sound and toppled over into the mud. When Harry got to him, he was calling to his mother with a mouth engorged with mud. In the darkness it was impossible to detect how badly he was wounded. But as soon as he moved his stomach came pouring out of the gaping wound the blast had made. The deputy brought his hands down to stop the leakage, but it did no good. He shook his head in disbelief as if to say that such a thing could not be happening. Then, quickly, his eyes glazed over, and his body gave a short convulsive shudder. He lay still.

There were more shots, They took clumps out of trees and caused branches to shatter and go flying into the air. Leaves kept dropping, but nothing more lethal.

Harry was angry. The battle had been going on for perhaps half an hour, and at no time had he, or anyone else in the eradication team, gotten so much as a glimpse of the assailants.

He turned to the men who'd come with him—there were just two of them now—and instructed them to rejoin the main force. There was no sense trying to retrieve the bodies until the firing had ceased and the area was pacified.

"And what are you going to do?" one of them asked.

"I don't rightly know as yet."

"You watch out for yourself, you hear?"

Harry indicated he would. The two volunteers then proceeded on their way, headed in the direction of the battle that, far from subsiding, seemed to be gaining in intensity.

Harry began moving in the opposite direction. He was anxious to confront the men who'd just fired on them. When he had agreed to come along with Turk on this misbegotten expedition, it was mostly out of curiosity. But now he felt a personal stake in the affair. It might be a lost cause—Harry could not see how it could be anything but a lost cause—but it was important that he emerge from this with at least

some shred of dignity left.

He didn't move far from the site where they'd been fired upon, assuming that the attackers would expose themselves, if only to determine how much damage they'd inflicted.

To his satisfaction, one man did materialize after several minutes had passed, hesitantly weaving his way through the pines, his shotgun held at the ready.

Harry watched him, waiting for him to come closer. He was now standing over one of the men he had murdered. Then he knelt down, obviously ready to go through the man's pockets.

"Hold it right there," Harry said, sighting his .44 on him.

The man had a companion who'd been looking out for him. A shotgun roared, and the branches directly over Harry's head disintegrated.

Though he was unhurt, the surprise attack distracted Harry momentarily. He instinctively moved back just as the first assailant picked up his shotgun and fired.

His shot went low, shattering the trunk of an alder and spewing a geyser of mud into the air. Harry fired his Magnum.

One round caught the assailant in his kneecap, the other in his thigh. He spun first to the left, then to the right, seemingly unable to make his mind up where to fall. Then he crumpled, becoming a small and bloody figure against a backdrop of damp and gloom. He made a horrible keening noise, mourning his own life as it seeped away into the mud that had turned into a burial ground for so many this night.

His friend, wise enough to keep concealed, fired twice more in rapid succession. Harry was relying on the darkness to save him, and the darkness cooperated. Both shells, in spite of the concussive sound of their explosions, failed to get anywhere near their intended target.

Although Harry had intended to get back to Turk's force, he found that this was no longer necessary. The battle appeared to be coming to him.

Everywhere he looked there were men running. Maybe they had some purpose, but it was impossible to discern. They shot and ran. Sometimes they wouldn't bother shooting but would just move. Were they advancing? Retreating? Harry didn't know. He didn't even have any idea whether these were members of the eradication team or were the men who had opened fire on them.

It was ludicrous to go anywhere or shoot at anybody under the circumstances. Harry was baffled. How had the situation been allowed to develop to this point?

When someone began firing at him, however, Harry had no choice but to answer in kind. There was a sharp exchange. Then Harry heard a muffled groan. He never saw anything, couldn't be certain he'd hit anybody, but for the moment he seemed no longer to be a target.

It was then that he turned and saw a sight that positively astonished him.

Coming through the forest, with a delirious look in his eyes and a banshee yell rising from his lungs, was Turk. Blood covered nearly half his face, transforming it into a mask, at once grotesque and absurd. He was alone, but it looked as though he really thought he was leading the force. He might have believed that he was directing troops over the battlefield at Verdun. Or Gettysburg as far as that went. Whatever the case, Harry was certain he'd taken leave of his senses.

He was half-running, half-stumbling, frequently discharging the .38 he had in his hand, though he didn't appear to be aiming it at anything. Harry realized what had happened. Rather than settling for a diversionary strategy, covering fire, which was all that Harry had requested, or a feint to confuse their antagonists, Turk had initiated a direct assault. How he had managed to convince anyone to go along with him was a mystery to Harry, but he had evidently succeeded.

Now Turk was alone and oblivious to the danger he was in. His troops were in disarray. The air around him was filled with bullets, and yet he made no effort to protect himself. It was as if he wanted to die.

Harry called to him. Turk didn't hear. He kept right on hurrying forward, shooting at the unseen enemy.

There didn't seem to be any alternative but to tackle the man and throw him to the ground. Which was precisely what Harry did.

Turk struggled against his rescuer; he was damned if he was about to let anyone save him, Harry tried his best to talk some sense into him, but Turk refused to listen. He didn't even seem to recognize Harry. His eyes were wild, testifying to some very severe derangement. But his strength was there. He was frenzied, and his madness had given him frightening power.

He managed to throw off Harry and get himself upright. Then to make it clear that he would take no further interference, he trained his gun on Harry. Harry was afraid he might actually kill him just for the hell of it.

"It's me, Turk. Harry Callahan."

If there was any recognition in Turk's eyes, it was hard to tell. He

said not a word. He scowled and made a sound that might have been a word, then he began again in the direction he was going when Harry had stopped him.

He didn't get very far.

A 30-30 blast, tore through his abdomen. Harry thought for an instant that he could see Turk's viscera flying out his back. The wound was critical, and the very force of the blast caused Turk to totter. Why he didn't go down was puzzling. Perhaps his mind had failed to register the extent of his body's injuries.

He now started forward again, one hand clutching his open stomach, the other still affixed to his gun. Like a man who's been on a wild bender, he lurched and wobbled but miraculously maintained his vertical posture. There were a great many more shots, not all of them directed at Turk. For a few seconds longer, his luck, if luck it still was any longer, held.

But the man with the 30-30 might just have been biding his time until he could be certain of success. Or possibly, like Harry, he was so astonished by Turk's insistence on remaining upright that he wanted to see how long the man could go on before he was struck a second time.

The second blast of the 30-30 catapulted Turk into the air. When he came down, his arms were extended. He looked like a bird whose wings won't work for it anymore.

Weirdly, he was still alive. He grappled at the mud and attempted to pick himself up again. But then he faltered and ceased his futile efforts. By the time Harry got to him he had breathed his last.

CHAPTER

Ten

Turk's was the final death of the night. The pandemonium had ended. There was no one to be seen in any direction, neither the defenders of these clandestine farms nor the men who had sought to arrest them and eradicate their source of livelihood. The rain had begun to taper off, but the mist that it had left behind clung to the fields and woodland, smothering the bodies of those who had not lived to see the dawn.

Harry felt that he was the only person left alive in the world. Way in the distance he could hear the faint rumble of the trucks and pickups. He presumed that the eradication team, now leaderless, was wending its way down Rain Mountain and back to Russian River. All those John Doe warrants would have to be put away for another day.

Harry had not elected to stay up here. He had been left behind. Turk's bloody corpse was his only company.

In spite of the disastrous result of the expedition, Harry decided that it wouldn't be a total loss if he could gain some understanding of why it had occurred. Not that the growers had a great desire to be busted, but that did not explain why they had resisted the authorities so violently and claimed as many lives as they had. Making huge sums of money from the growing and selling of marijuana was a serious crime to be sure, and several years in prison might be expected if one was convicted for it, but the punishment the courts might choose to mete out for trafficking in weed would be nothing compared to what they would give to those convicted of murder, particularly when police officers and agents of the federal government were among the victims. There had to be, Harry felt sure, some kind of an explanation. It might not make much sense, but he was interested in hearing it all the same.

Although the cloud cover remained as pervasive as ever, especially farther up toward the summit, the approach of day carried with it a trickle of light sufficient to disclose the landscape.

He could begin to discern where the woods ended, where the open fields began. What in the darkness had been a terrifying confusion of underbrush and trees and mud took on a more innocent, almost rustic appearance. Nothing looked remotely threatening.

It was chilly and damp, and Harry longed for a shower and a change of clothes, and most of all, for sleep. He was exhausted, running on momentum and adrenalin. But if he were to find out what he wanted, and then get off Rain Mountain, he would just have to wait for relief.

He said his good-bye to Turk, promising himself that if he could he would be back to recover the body. He'd be doing it to fulfill a personal obligation, he supposed. Turk was beyond caring.

He got up toward the next rise and halted. Below him he spied a lone figure walking downhill at a leisurely pace. He was carrying a shotgun over his shoulder, but his loping gait and the meandering path he was following indicated that he was in no special hurry to get anywhere. And why should he be? The battle was over.

For all Harry knew he could have been one of the men who'd fired on him. Whoever he was, the shotgun resting on his shoulder certainly implicated him. Harry decided to follow him.

The first light of day and the cessation of rain had not done anything to make the conditions underfoot any better. Only the outer crust had begun to dry. With the slightest bit of pressure it would give way, delivering the stroller right back into the muck again.

From time to time the man with the shotgun stopped and cocked his head as though he had heard something to arouse his suspicions, but then he'd go on again. Harry stayed well behind him and took the further precaution of finding trees and outcroppings to hide himself from sight.

After maybe half an hour's trek the man came upon a stone shelter that might once have been utilized for storage. It now lacked a roof and the walls had fallen into disrepair. Harry's quarry, confident that he was in no danger, rested his weapon against the wall and stepped inside.

When he looked up and saw Harry, he expelled an angry groan.

"Damn it!" he cried out. "Not while I'm taking a shit."

"That'll have to wait."

The man grunted and rose, hiking up his trousers. The .44 sighted on him seemed to dismay him less than the fact that he had been interrupted in such a manner.

"I was just trying to heed the call of nature," he protested. "What are you going to do, waste me for that?"

"Who are you?"

"Hey, man, I ought to ask you that."

Harry offered him a strange smile. “Yes, punk, but you forget I’m the one with the gun.”

“Yeah, you’re the one with the gun.” The man didn’t sound any more conciliatory.

Harry decided to lower the Magnum so that it was trained on the man’s crotch. This produced a reaction.

“You wouldn’t . . . ,” he said.

“Do you know me?”

“Hey, man, I don’t know you from Adam.”

“Then you don’t know what I would or would not do.”

The man seemed to consider this logic for a while. “I see where you’re coming from.”

“Good, that’s a start. Now let’s take it from the top. Who are you?”

“Jason . . . Jason Milandra.”

Harry remembered the name. “You own a farm hereabouts?”

He hesitated. “You’re a cop.”

“That’s right.”

“You’re a fucking cop.” The revelation was taking its time to sink in. “I didn’t have anything to do with what happened last night.”

“Who did?”

“I don’t know.” Seeing that this was hardly likely to satisfy his interrogator he added, “Some dudes.”

That wasn’t much better. “Just some dudes?”

“That’s right.”

“Quite a commontion for just some dudes to make, I’d say. You know that there must be eight or nine men lying dead in those fields right now because of what happened. Cops, deputized citizens, maybe a federal marshal or two.” Harry was trying to see what kind of reaction he could elicit from the otherwise impassive Jason Milandra.

“That’s a problem,” Milandra conceded. “You are right about that. But you have to remember, man, that our lives were at stake. We didn’t defend ourselves, we would’ve been butchered. It’s happened before.”

“What do you mean you would have been butchered? We were only armed in the event we were fired on.”

“In that case, why were the cops the first to open fire?”

Harry recalled the mysterious barrage that had triggered off the engagement. Who had been the first to open fire? If it wasn’t the

eradication team and it wasn't the growers, then who was left?

Instead of responding directly, Harry posed another question.

"Why did you go to so much trouble? Why didn't you just disappear? In these mountains, that shouldn't have been so difficult."

"You don't understand, man. We were tired of running. You fucking people have been coming up here, wasting folks, we were tired of running." When he saw that Harry wasn't yet convinced, he went on. "Look at what happened to Chapman, to Harris and his old lady. That was just the beginning. There's no question, man, you're no better than us. You want to waste us, then take our crops and sell them yourselves. You figure, 'Hey, who's going to give a shit about those hippies? Nobody knows who the fuck they are to begin with so who's going to miss them when they're dead?' "

There seemed to be something to what Milandra was saying.

Another question: "You know a guy by the name of Mike Kilborn?"

"You shitting me? Kilborn? The dude's a cock-sucker. He's in it good. He's been going around advising us to sell our farms."

"Oh? Who does he want you to sell them to?"

"To him. What do you think? Otherwise—" He made a slashing gesture across his neck. "What am I telling you this for? You're all the same. You, Kilborn, Ham, all the fucking cops."

"What about Turk?"

"Turk?" Milandra had no way of knowing that Turk was dead, but apparently it would make no difference to him. "Turk is a goddamn joke, man. Nothing was happening out of his office. That was all for show. The poor bastard has no idea, but it's all for show. We know better here in the mountains what's going down in Russian River than he or that joker, Davenport, do. No, the reality is with Kilborn and whoever the fuck he answers to." He gazed at the Magnum with his sad stoned eyes and said, "So what'll it be, man? You want my balls? You going to take me in? I got to know, man. The suspense will kill me before you do."

"No, my friend, you are free to go. All I'm going to do is relieve you of your weapon here."

It was a Weatherby, Milandra complained, and it had cost him a bundle.

"That well may be, but you're just going to have to go out and get yourself another one."

Harry was appropriating the shotgun so ballistics tests could be run on it. If it turned out that anyone had sustained any injuries from

shells discharged from Milandra's weapon then Harry would personally see to it that the farmer was taken in. At the moment though he lacked the power to do so. He was, after all, acting in no official capacity. Moreover, he was a wanted man himself.

With a resentful look on his face, Milandra proceeded to loosen his belt, about to resume where he'd left off.

"One more question."

"Yeah?" He sounded none too happy about the prospect.

"How the hell do I get down from here and back to town?"

"You go east man, you keep going east, toward the sun, and you'll come to the road."

That was all well and good. The problem was finding the sun. Too much rain, too many damn clouds. The sun, when it finally broke through, was no brighter than the neon sign that told drivers they were approaching Danton's Motel Inn.

It took Harry the better part of three hours to make his way down Rain Mountain. On the way he spotted a logging truck that looked like it had been a part of Turk's caravan. It probably had stalled out. No one had cared to stick around and try and repair it. The idea had been to get off the mountain as quickly as possible.

Farther toward the bottom Harry came across the school bus they'd pushed out of the way. They should have known better. Seeing what had happened, they'd have been better off turning right around.

At the base of the mountain, Harry was thoroughly exhausted. His clothes were wet and clammy against his skin and when he touched his face, he found that his hands were stained with mud and dust. He probably looked like a man who'd been in the coal mines for too long.

The thought of walking all the way back to town, a distance of twelve miles, was a daunting prospect after making the trek down the mountain. Harry decided he would hitch. It was a better idea in theory than in practice, given the sparseness of traffic along this part of the highway.

Eventually, after forty minutes or so, he spotted a pickup rattling along in his direction. He stepped onto the roadway, with his finger out.

The truck continued on beyond him, then abruptly came to a stop.

The back of this track was packed solid with what looked to be huge bales of hay, tied firmly with rope. The cabin in front had only one occupant. The driver, a farmer from all appearances, had a face as roughhewn and weathered as his clothes. A visored cap was set

backward on his head.

“How’re you doing?” the man said. His voice was like the atmospheric conditions; a fog had filtered into his lungs.

“Could be better,” Harry replied.

The driver gave a cursory glance at the mud-spattered clothes and agreed with his assessment. “I can see that. Where you headed? Into Russian River?”

“That’s right.”

“Well, I’m glad I can do you a good turn. That’s where I’m going too. Taking my crops to market there.” He reached over and shook Harry’s hand. “You have a name?” he asked.

Harry gave him the one he was born with.

“Well, it’s great to meet you. My name’s Tom Reardon.”

The name struck a cord. This was the father of the young man Harry’d shared a cell with a few nights back. Harry regarded him again. Yes, Tom was the same fellow he’d briefly glimpsed in the courtroom on the morning Judge Plinth advised him to get out of town. Judge Plinth was wiser than he realized, Harry thought.

“Heard there was a little ruckus up there on Rain Mountain last night,” Tom said.

“Ruckus is one way of putting it.”

“Yup, news travels fast. Kind of embarrassing when you think about it. The cops really fucked that one up.”

There was no way of determining whether he suspected Harry of being among their number, but there was a good chance that that was what he thought. Especially since Harry cradled a shotgun in his hands.

“Yes, they did.”

“The radio news, they got only part of it. From what I hear, it was a hell of a lot worse than they’re letting on.”

‘You don’t sound displeased about it.”

“All I can say, mister, is live and let live. There’s no way the cops are going to root out those kids up there. All they’re going to do is get themselves killed. Now take me. I’m a law-abiding citizen. Ain’t no truck with the shit they’re growing up there. Never smoked no marijuana in my life.” He made marijuana sound as though it was composed of eight or nine syllables. “But they ain’t harming me. Fact is they’re helping me out, bringing lots of business into the area that there’d never be otherwise, you know? Everyone makes money. Even

the cops, they make money. Hiring all these boys to go around with their investigatin' and such."

"Do you happen to know what happened to the force that was headed up to Lunar Mountain? I've been . . . well, out of touch, you might say."

Reardon nodded but kept his eyes locked on the narrow road ahead of him. "That crew never made it to first base is what they tell me. They got one truck stuck, they get that out, then another one goes into a ditch, they got that one out. By that time they found out what was happening over on Rain, they figure the hell with it and pull back. Can't say that I blame them."

Neither could Harry. So it looked as though Davenport had triumphed by doing nothing at all.

"The only thing wrong with all this shit," Reardon said as they were about to enter the precincts of Russian River, "is all this violence. People killing people, it's just plain wrong." He slammed his open palm on the steering wheel. He wanted Harry to know just how serious he was about this.

Harry thanked him for the lift and got out of the truck.

"You have a good day, you hear? And clean yourself up. You don't want to go around looking like that."

"No, you're right there," Harry said, closing the door behind him.

It was right then that Harry paused. He breathed deeply. He took another long breath. The smell was awfully familiar. And it was coming from the back of the truck. Even after it pulled away down Van Buren, the smell persisted.

The smell was the smell of the substance Tom had denied having truck with. The smell was marijuana.

Even on foot Harry had no trouble tracing Tom Reardon's truck. Russian River was small enough that anything could be found if one were willing to look hard for it.

It was parked on a street not far from where Elsie lived, in the slumlike district Davenport had pointed out. There was no sun to brighten the roofs of the squat shelters in which the perpetually stoned youth of Russian River lived. In the dull light they looked just sad and derelict.

The back of the truck was still crammed with its load, but that situation was shortly to be changed. A couple of men were scrambling into the rear, about to remove the bales and transfer them to another waiting truck which, Harry noted, bore official U.S. government plates.

Now this might be a perfectly legitimate procedure. The bales of marijuana, disguised with an outer layer of hay, might be intended as state's evidence. But Harry's instinct, and his accumulated experience, told him otherwise. If any of this was legitimate, why was the transfer occurring here, in a neighborhood known for the sale and consumption of illegal drugs? And why was an alleged farmer like Tom Reardon, Senior, involved in it?

Harry was about to investigate further when he heard his name being called.

He wheeled about, only to find himself looking into the eyes of Ham Kelso. Ham was wearing his uniform, but he would have been well advised to invest in a suit a few sizes larger than the one he had on. The buttons were threatening to pop. So, Harry observed, were his inquisitive eyes.

"What can I do for you?" Harry asked him pleasantly enough.

"I had no idea you were still in Russian River, Callahan. I was under the impression you had left us for a more favorable climate."

"I like the rain." Harry started to walk away from him.

Ham came after him. Harry could hear how hard he was breathing as he sought to keep up.

Harry was proceeding toward the truck, and it was clear that that wasn't at all to Ham's liking. Ham wanted to articulate this but was too busy trying to catch his breath.

"What's your problem, Ham?"

Ham stepped back, then produced his .38. "Your problem," he managed to say.

Harry shrugged. "Why do we keep having to go through this, Ham? It's getting to be like a bad movie."

Ham wouldn't respond. He motioned Harry toward him. But Harry didn't move.

Ham had fully expected he would. He really seemed at a loss as to what he would do next.

Across the street Harry glimpsed Reardon, who was just coming out of one of the corrugated structures. Tom stared long and hard at Ham and the man he'd just given a lift to. He seemed to be trying to figure what to make of this.

"You're a wanted man, Callahan. We're going to extradite you back to San Francisco for wounding a federal officer."

"You know, you disappoint me, Ham. That's exactly what I expected you were going to say."

From around the corner a second cop appeared. Harry was acquainted with him too. He was the other arresting officer who had taken him in. He still didn't look too sure of himself though he had his gun directed at Harry's head.

"Two against one," Ham pointed out gratuitously. "The smart thing is to give yourself up."

The unloading of Reardon's truck was continuing unimpeded. It was evidently thought that Harry was merely an irritant who could be safely gotten out of the way—and soon.

Harry consented to drop his rifle but that was all. "I think you're going to have to shoot me," he said but in such a matter-of-fact way that he disconcerted Ham and made his younger colleague terribly upset.

"You don't know what you're saying, Callahan. You're around the bend. Nothing would give me greater pleasure."

But obviously Ham wasn't prepared to take this pleasure right here and now.

"Tell me, Ham, who are you working for?"

"The sheriff's office," declared the younger cop confidently. "Who did you think?"

"I'm not sure. That's why I asked. How about Howard McPheeters?"

Ham scowled. Then he stepped up to Harry, ready to handcuff him. But as soon as he attempted to do so, Harry retracted his arm, forcing Ham to lean forward. Then Harry shot out his right leg, hooking it around Ham's and forcing the cop off balance.

Ham emitted a sound that reminded Harry of the squawk of one of those birds hunters like to pepper with shotgun blasts for sport. Stumbling, he lost hold of both handcuffs and .38.

"Shoot the fucker!" he urged his partner.

His partner rushed forward, then stopped three feet away from Harry. "Hold it!" he shouted.

Harry wasn't listening to him. He brought the edge of his right hand down on Ham's neck. Ham grunted and collapsed. When he groped for his gun, Harry planted his foot down on his hand, stopping him dead.

"This is your final warning!"

Harry turned to confront the second cop. "You're going after the wrong person, kid," was what he said.

Ham was reaching out with his other hand, hoping to recover the .38 without Harry noticing. He had it just within his grasp when

Harry stamped down his left foot, causing the helpless cop to shriek with pain.

His partner remained immobilized. The gun was shaking in his hand.

Across the street the men who were in the midst of transferring the bales from Reardon's truck to the other one stopped what they were doing. It was now clear that they could not rely on the local constabulary to dispose of the threat that Harry presented to their operation.

From their slightly elevated position in the open end of the truck, Tom's two assistants drew out handguns and simultaneously opened fire.

One bullet creased the side of Harry's face, setting loose a flow of blood that a particularly bad nick with a razor might produce. The others were close but failed to strike him. Instantly, he flattened himself, draping himself across Ham's prostrate form.

Ham's partner was not so lucky. Two of the rounds meant for Harry hit him, one in the stomach, the other in his head, slightly above his left eye. In death he looked as incredulous as he had in life. And so pronounced was his paralysis that it seemed to take him forever to sink to the ground.

Seizing hold of the shotgun that had once belonged to Milandra Harry tried firing it. It jammed. He rolled over, which was something of a painful experience for Ham who knew enough not to move until the shooting stopped. Now Harry grasped hold of the .38 and tried using that. More successful.

He hit neither of his assailants, but he did force them to scramble from the truck and around to the other side where they were less exposed. What had happened to Reardon was hard to say. Harry certainly did not intend to linger around to find out.

He was off and running, weaving in and out like a son of a bitch, determined to put as much distance between himself and the men who were anxious to take his life.

As far as he could see only one refuge in Russian River, maybe in the state of California, remained to him and that was exactly where he was bound: the home of Elsie Cranston.

CHAPTER

Eleven

At first, Elsie had no idea who this man was, with mud-caked clothing and blood coursing down his face and eyes that suggested the presence of fever, he could have just emerged from a Grade Z horror film.

But then Elsie recognized that this was in fact Harry Callahan, and that probably what had happened was that he'd just gone and gotten himself into a little more trouble than he could handle.

"God, you look a sight."

She guided him into the bathtub and proceeded to remove his clothes, though he assured her that this was something he could do very well himself. Actually, it wasn't so easy since the sweat and the damp acted like glue, causing the fabric to cling to his skin.

"I thought you were dead," she said. She stooped down and turned on the taps. Soon there was lots of steam filling the room. "When you didn't come back with the rest of them, I thought that you hadn't made it."

"I made it all right."

He was little disposed to talk.

"You know that Turk was killed." She didn't sound sad about this. On the other hand, she didn't sound happy about it either. She just seemed to have resigned herself to the fact. Could be she'd anticipated it so long ago that the shock had worn off even before the first round from the 30-30 had torn through Turk's stomach.

"Yes, I know. I was with him. He seemed to want to die."

She raised her dark eyes to him. "He got his wish," she said. Then she added, "They're looking for you."

"Who?"

"Everybody. First they went looking for your body."

"Now they'll come looking for whatever's living and breathing."

"That's right." She was very quiet. "You are in a lot more trouble than I'd ever have guessed."

"That doesn't surprise me."

The water was as hot as it would ever be. Elsie handed Harry a couple of fresh towels. “When you want, I’ll be waiting,”

Fighting off the sleep that was ready at the first sign of surrender to claim him, Harry dressed and went downstairs. He found Elsie in the kitchen. She obviously felt more at home there than anywhere else in her rambling home.

She was not alone.

Frank Davenport was seated at the table, partaking of some of her tea. No one passed through her house without being given a sampling of her tea.

Whether he had been there all along or shown up while Harry was sloughing off the detritus of Rain Mountain in the bathtub was not immediately clear.

Davenport did not appear especially delighted to see Harry. In fact, his expression was rather sour. “You look older, Callahan.”

“I feel older. But that’s a great deal better than feeling dead.”

Davenport was not ready to argue the point. “That was one hell of a mess,” he said, referring to the abortive invasion of marijuana country.

Harry took a seat at the table. He looked over to Elsie, trying to deduce what she was thinking. But her face was impassive, betraying no emotion.

“From what I hear, you stayed well out of it. All those trucks that kept getting stuck, it’s a damn shame,” Harry said.

“What are you saying? That it was my fault Turk’s two-pronged attack was reduced to one?”

“Let me put it this way. I wouldn’t be surprised if you made sure you never made it up Lunar Mountain. Now whether you deliberately sabotaged those trucks, well, I wouldn’t know about that. But they played into your hands, those accidents. You realized the whole invasion idea was doomed from the start.”

“And you didn’t?”

“Hey, I’m not blaming you. Maybe if I were in your shoes I’d have done the same thing. Now you have Turk’s job. It looks like that’s not all of Turk’s you might be thinking of moving in on.”

He wasn’t directing his eyes at Elsie, but there could be no doubt as to his meaning. She flushed and looked away from the table. Davenport remained as glum as before and did not react.

“I want you to know something, Callahan. I am only looking after my own ass. I have no grandiose plans like Turk. I have no intention of tearing up tons of marijuana fields and handing out warrants like advertising circulars. That is not my aim in life, never has been.”

“Don’t want to shake the boat?”

“If you want to put it like that, exactly. I tend to my job, mind my business, that’s it. One day, if I’m lucky, I’ll be given a decent assignment and move far away from here. Until then I’ll hold the fort.”

“What about McPheeters?”

“What about him? He’s a necessary evil.”

“Like Kilborn?”

“Like Kilborn. I don’t like either of them, but there’s no sense trying to buck them. The main thing I’m concerned with is ensuring peace in Russian River. Life was fairly peaceful before Turk. I want to make sure it gets that way again. And whoever I have to do business with to maintain that peace . . .” He shrugged, leaving the sentence dangling. Evidently, he didn’t feel that he had quite made himself clear. “I am not corrupt. I am not on the take, I want you to know that. I am not profiting off the marijuana or anything else.”

“I never said that you were.”

“But I could tell that was what you were thinking. You assume that because everyone else in this damn town is on the take, I must be too. I’m not. I couldn’t get to sleep at night if I was.”

“Your sins are more in the venal class rather than the mortal one is what you’re saying?”

“Possibly. So I had those trucks sabotaged, so what? What good would it have done to charge into those mountains? How many men did Turk lose? Half a dozen? More? Including himself. Everyone survived under my command.”

“I think that’s just fine. I’m not criticizing you.”

Davenport sighed. The world was hard on him. He wasn’t a saint, nor a fanatic, nor firebrand, nor prophet. He wasn’t a very good man, but there were a great many far worse than him. He just had the ill fortune to be stuck somewhere in the middle. He couldn’t necessarily be condemned for what he was doing—or wasn’t doing.

“I don’t like it,” he said. “But nobody said that I had to like it.”

“What about Elsie?” Harry asked.

Elsie rested her eyes on Davenport. She looked as interested as Harry was in what his answer might be.

“She wants what I want. We’ve talked. We agree basically on terms. Isn’t that right, Elsie?”

“I suppose so.”

“What is that supposed to mean, that you agree on terms?”

“Peace in Russian River. An end to this politicking.”

Davenport was being more than circumspect, he was being downright evasive. Harry guessed he was saying that from here on in Elsie would no longer have to act as go-between for the local narcotics office. That meant no more Kilborns. That probably also meant no more Callahans.

This assumption was borne out a moment later when Davenport said, “That brings me to you, Callahan.”

“I had a feeling you’d get to me eventually.”

“You can see now why your presence in Russian River would not contribute to the general welfare of its population? You are something like a walking catastrophe, frankly. You’re wanted in San Francisco on charges of injuring a DEA agent. And I think you know how our local police force feels about you.”

“They’ve made it pretty clear.”

“But I am not a malicious man. I don’t want to throw you to the dogs.”

“Kind of you.”

“I’ve spoken to McPheeters about your case. If you leave town today, I guarantee you that charges against you will be dropped. You can return to San Francisco, rejoin the force, there’ll be no problem. It’ll be like nothing ever happened.”

Davenport seemed so convinced of the generosity of this offer that he could not conceive of Harry rebuffing him.

“Sounds like a fine idea, Frank.”

Davenports eyes lit up. For the first time since Harry had entered the room, he looked happy. “So you’ll accept my proposition?”

“I just would like to get a few things straight that I don’t think we’ve covered yet.”

“Sure, what is it?”

“Now, basically what is happening here is a systematic campaign to murder the growers and strip their property of the harvests and then sell them on the market.” Davenport was about to interrupt, but Harry stopped him. “Let me finish. Never mind that murders are being carried out but they also have the sanction of Howard McPheeters,

who is using his office as a conduit for the marijuana. It's very easy to account for all that weed by calling it state's evidence. Maybe you adjust the weight periodically so no one knows just how much comes in and how much goes out. But what the hell? It's only a little weed between friends."

Davenport was becoming angry. He was about to rise from the table, his fists clenched and ready to pound the wood—or Harry, depending on how violent his emotions were. "You don't understand the first thing about this," he was saying.

Harry shook his head. "Sit down, Frank. I think your conscience is bothering you. It's those murders, isn't it? Fuck the drugs, it's those killings. What do you know about Tom Reardon? Father and son?"

Davenport hadn't been expecting the question.

"I don't know what you mean. They're farmers. They get into brawls, they get shitfaced every weekend, the kid hot wires cars. What of it? That's the sheriff's department."

"No, that's your department. Reardon is busy bringing bales of shit down from the mountains, That would imply that he and some of his family members are responsible for those murders. I wouldn't be surprised if they were the ones who started the battle up there last night. We didn't fire first. Neither did the growers. But somebody with an interest in seeing a lot of blood spilled and Turk gotten out of the way did. I suspect it was the Reardon clan that did the honors."

"You have proof? You go to the D.A.'s office. I don't want to know about it."

"The bales of grass are on their way, south I would imagine, right now. I saw them myself, being taken from Reardon's truck and put into a DEA van. You're looking at an eyewitness, friend."

Davenport wasn't anxious to hear any more. "This is all irrelevant to the issue at hand. That issue is you."

Harry continued, ignoring him. "But it's a wonderful scheme, the way it's set up. They have you installed in Turk's place with your great love of keeping the peace and upsetting no applecarts. They've got the Reardons doing the heavy work. Worse comes to worse, anyone nails them, they'll be no problem setting them up, letting them take the fall for it. Between McPheeters and the Reardons you are blessed with Mike Kilborn, world's foremost sleaze. A beautiful equation, Frank. Very ingenious. You've got to give McPheeters credit. And you being so incorruptible, you aren't making a dime off of it. All you've got is a promise that some day you'll be given a cushy job far away from Russian River. And maybe, just maybe, they've given Elsie

here to you as an inducement."

Harry knew this would provoke her, and it did all right.

She stood up and said in a voice she could barely keep under control, "Nobody controls me. Nobody tells me what to do."

"Turk did," Harry reminded her.

"I did what I wanted. Turk asked as a friend."

"Problem is you've been keeping the wrong company."

"Enough of this!" Davenport was clearly losing patience. "Whether or not what you say is true makes no difference to me at this point. Right now, the only thing that interests me is what your decision is. Are you going to leave Russian River? That's the only thing we are considering here. Not McPheeters, not the Reardons, not Kilborn. Are you suffering from the illusion that you can change any of it? It's all firmed up, no one's going to stop it. If you understand that, then you will be out of here this afternoon."

He fell silent and waited for an answer. He still seemed confident that Harry would not refuse him.

Harry let him bide his time for several moments while he pretended to reflect seriously on his decision. At last he said, "You know I've been thinking, Frank, and I've concluded that you really have a quaint little town here. Very picturesque. I wouldn't want to leave feeling that I've left without getting the most out of it. So I suppose I'll stick around a few more days."

"I can't believe you're saying this." Davenport stood up. "You must be out of your goddamn mind."

"Some people seem to think so," Harry replied cheerily.

"That's it then. You do what you want. But I've done all I can. From now on you're on your own. I am not responsible."

"I wouldn't want you to be, Frank. You got enough on your mind already."

Davenport didn't say good-bye. He just stormed right out the door.

Elsie had her back to him. Harry wondered whether she was crying, but when he addressed her and she turned, there were no tears in her eyes. But she looked very somber and vulnerable.

"Well now, I think I'll be on my way too. I want to thank you for the use of your bath."

"Where will you go?"

"Back to Danton's Motel Inn, where else?"

"They'll find you there."

“They’ll find me anywhere I go. I’m not hiding this time around.”

There was a protracted silence. “Don’t go,” she said.

“Don’t go?”

“What am I going to do with all these empty rooms if you go?”

“Elsie, are you sure of what you’re saying? You put me up, and you’ll be risking your life. There’s no reason for that.”

“I know what I’m doing, Harry Callahan. I know exactly what I’m doing. You were right about me. What you said. I was under their control. Turk, Kilborn, Davenport. I’ve gone far enough. Have I made myself clear?”

“Very,” said Harry.

CHAPTER

Twelve

The dream was muddled, the kind of dream that would never be recollected once consciousness returned in the sober light of day. At the very end of it, glass shattered, loud and abrasive.

Harry woke from the dream at that instant and peered into the darkness. It was then that he realized that the glass shattering was no dream. It was something very real that had just occurred downstairs.

Next to him, Elsie slept on. The disturbance had scarcely registered, for she'd merely rolled over and snuggled farther under the blankets as though this were sufficient protection against the intruders Harry was sure he'd shortly discover.

He had expected something like this, maybe not quite this soon, but it was no big surprise. Failure to heed Davenport's warning at seven in the evening clearly was intended to result in death by midnight.

Actually, it was beyond midnight, though Harry did not consult his digital watch, which was resting on the table beside the bed. All his concentration was directed at the Magnum, which lay there too. Elsie had told him she wanted it out of her sight, but Harry wouldn't hear of it. It was vitally necessary, he'd said, and he'd won his point.

The difficulty was that he was so dead tired from the events of the last forty-eight hours that he could hardly get himself mobilized. His mind was adrift in a thick haze, his body was a clumsy instrument with wobbly limbs. His weariness was so pervasive that if he wasn't careful, he could fall back asleep. Even now, sitting up in bed, all he had to do was close his eyes and consciousness would be annihilated. He was getting too old for this.

Taking hold of his gun, he rose from the bed. Elsie stirred and her eyes opened. "What?" she asked.

"Trouble, I think."

He hadn't heard anything since the glass had come apart, but far from taking solace in the subsequent silence, he was edgier than before.

She immediately jerked up, clutching the sheet to her neck. It had been one thing to offer Harry the hospitality of her home, her bed,

and her body. It had been an act of courage, to be sure, but she hadn't any idea as to what she was getting into. The danger was something hypothetical, something that would never actually happen. And now it seemed that it was happening, and she was afraid, as she had every right to be.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to stay put. But if something should happen . . ." Harry reached into the top drawer of the night table. There he'd placed a .22 handgun that he often wore strapped to his ankle as an additional precaution. "Have you ever fired a gun?"

"Hunting rifles."

"Do you think you can use this?"

She looked from him to the weapon. "If I have to, yes."

"Good." He took her hand and knitted her fingers around the grips of the gun.

He then got into his trousers and, barefoot, padded to the door.

There was no way he could keep it from creaking when he drew it open. He only hoped that the intruders were too far away to hear. It was a big house, after all. It would go better for him if they suspected that the occupants hadn't caught onto the break-in.

The staircase wasn't much more cooperative than the door had been. Being as old and in need of renovation as it was, the house creaked and whistled and knocked a great deal, sometimes with human intervention, sometimes not.

Conservation-minded as Elsie was, no lights had been left burning anywhere in the house, and it was very dark throughout the rooms and hallways. Once Harry stubbed his toe against a wall he hadn't known was there. He resisted the impulse to cry aloud, confining his oath to a whisper.

When he got down to the second landing he stopped, listening carefully for any sound that would indicate the presence of his antagonists. The silence mocked him. Well now, he thought, maybe they're trying to be as stealthy as I am. It was likely that they did not know in which room their victims might be found. It must be frustrating for them, undertaking this exploration in the dark.

Then, just as he was about to descend farther to the first floor, he heard a voice. And though he couldn't quite make out what was said, he heard the response it elicited clearly enough: "Shut the fuck up, they'll hear us."

That was the truth all right, Harry said to himself.

Yet while the intruders had now signaled their whereabouts on the ground floor, Harry still needed to know where on the ground floor they were. Moreover, he would have liked to find out how many men he faced.

At the bottom of this staircase was a switch that would ignite the overhead light in the hallway. It was possible to turn it on without exposing himself unnecessarily, Harry reasoned. At the same time, how could it fail to provoke a reaction from the intruders? It would force them to initiate some action, and that in turn would give Harry the guidance he hoped to have before he formulated his strategy.

Slowly, with a concentration that was remarkable for the tedium it entailed, Harry descended the stairs: one foot, then the next, testing the weight of each individual stair so as not to cause any more noise than was unavoidable.

He worked his way to the bottom of the staircase. Then, flattening himself against the wall, he brought his hand up to the switch and depressed it.

The intruders weren't nearby, but they could not help noticing the sudden diffusion of light from the hallway.

"Hey, what's that?" a man asked, violating the silence they'd ordained for themselves.

"Shhhhhhh!" came the rejoinder.

Too late, Harry thought.

There were no more voices, no sound of movement for a time. The intruders were undoubtedly attempting to figure out what the light meant.

Perhaps a minute passed before one of them spoke. "We have to do something, damn it."

"I'm thinking," his companion answered him. He didn't sound particularly pleased to have to be doing this.

At last the man seemed to have reached a decision.

"Tom, you go out and see what it is."

"Wait a minute, why me?" This protest was delivered with great vehemence and volume.

"Get out there, asshole. Keep low and get out and see what's happening. You're a kid. Nobody's going to shoot you."

Ah-hah, Harry thought, what we seem to have here is the disreputable Reardon clan.

Tom Sr., was right about one thing. Harry was not about to shoot

the kid if he could help it.

Tom Jr. appeared within moments and poked his head into the hallway. He didn't linger longer than he had to, just gave the premises a cursory glance and quickly retired. Unless he had ventured out into the middle of the hallway, there was no way he could have spotted Harry.

"You didn't look hard enough," was what Harry heard now.

"I told you, Pa, it's clear."

"What turned on the fucking light then?"

"Tom, don't badger the kid. He didn't see anything, he didn't see anything. What're you going to do?"

Another voice. Who could that be? Harry wondered.

"Fuck all, I'll go check it out."

This, Harry decided, should be a happy surprise.

But Tom Sr. wasn't going this alone, not at all. He wanted his son and the man Harry couldn't identify to accompany him.

As soon as they showed themselves, Harry swiveled about, thrusting out his .44. "Freeze right there," he ordered.

The way in which he'd positioned himself all they could glimpse of him was the gun and the hand that held the gun.

This did not deter the elder Reardon who fired his .45 Enforcer unhesitatingly, and never mind that he knew he couldn't hit anything.

Harry, not able to see much of anything, got a round off to drive them back. But he was luckier than he'd anticipated.

The third member of the Reardon family, with whom Harry had yet to make acquaintance, sustained a minor but bloody leg wound that sent him howling into the hallway. He sprawled in the middle of the floor clutching his right leg below the knee.

"Lou!" Tom Jr. called. "Lou!"

It took the man several moments before he looked up and saw Harry looming over him. In his pain he seemed to have forgotten about Harry altogether. Instinctively, he reached for the Remington revolver he'd dropped.

"I wouldn't do that," Harry advised him, keeping the .44 targeted on him.

Lou apparently agreed with him, for he made no further move toward his gun.

In the meantime, Tom Sr. and his son had fled into the recesses of

the house. Obviously, they felt that there was no sense in battling Harry where he had the advantage.

Cautiously, Harry proceeded down the hallway. Recovering the Remington Colt, he left the injured Lou where he was and stepped into the adjoining room. It was cold and empty and dark.

They were there somewhere, if not in this room, then in the next. A vague light was visible in the far window which looked out onto the street but that, and what light there was from the hall, was all Harry had to navigate himself by.

He reached up, switched on yet another light.

Nothing. No one.

He could see into the kitchen. Father and son must have managed to locate some cranny to hunker down in, Harry suspected, because there was no evidence of them. And they were being very quiet. From time to time, Lou would mutter and rant in his pain, but that was it. There were no other sounds.

This could go on all night, Harry realized, this waiting game. He had exposed himself now and had sacrificed some of his advantage. But, on the other hand, he was aware of just how impatient these Reardons happened to be. And from everything he'd seen, it appeared that none of them was too bright. Given the right circumstances, they were apt to do something crazy. Harry wouldn't have wanted to stake his life on it, but it wasn't an impossible thing to hope for.

Then he heard a movement—not much, a rat scuttling from one side of the room to the other would have made more noise—but it was enough to alert him as to where at least one of the uninjured Reardons might be: to the extreme left of the kitchen, behind the antiquated coal stove.

Harry decided to fire directly at the side of the stove, see what kind of response this brought.

The shot caused an enormous amount of noise, a shriek of metal, and a vast eruption of coal dust that rose into a black cloud and nearly filled the whole of the kitchen. Harry heard more movement and considerable coughing.

He thought he saw someone. Or was it a shadow? He had no idea. He fired again in any case, trying to keep them off balance and draw them out at the same time.

In both these objectives, he appeared to have succeeded.

Someone—Tom Sr.? Tom Jr.?—responded with two shots, discharged in rapid succession. They were badly aimed, impacting against the wall beyond him, causing plaster to rain down on the

handwoven rugs that were among Elsie's most valuable possessions.

This display of inaccuracy emboldened Harry to advance farther. He bobbed and weaved in doing so. The blood pounded in his temples, he was alive again. He had gotten a second wind, and he intended to use it to the maximum. He doubted that there'd be a third.

At the threshold of the kitchen Harry dropped down, just in time to avoid another barrage that streaked across the room and into the windows. More glass ruptured with enough noise to arouse the neighbors. Maybe they'd summon the police, maybe not. Harry hoped they would resist the temptation. Russian River's police force would not look upon Harry with great favor.

When Harry raised his eyes, all he saw was a room full of coal dust and smoke, a mingling of poisonous gases. Once more the Reardons had managed to elude him. Wherever they were, they weren't in the kitchen any longer.

Harry raced into the pantry, where two old white refrigerators hummed in unison. Two means of exit were available from there: the cellar on his left and the back door. It made more sense for them to retreat into the yard than risk the cellar, where they might be trapped.

Nonetheless, Harry kicked the door open to be sure, and threw on the light at the top of the stairs. He found himself peering into a cavernous stone space, part of which had been converted for the storage of crates and trunks, while another part had been given over to what looked like hundreds of jars of jams and preserves.

Having no opportunity to invesigate more fully, Harry turned around and made his way into the yard that stretched all the way back to a grove of alders and pines. There was no sign of them in the yard. They'd probably concealed themselves among the trees and the dark.

Reasonably convinced that he had at least succeeded in expelling the two armed Reardons from the house, Harry went back in. It was important that he see to Elsie, get her to more secure surroundings if possible.

But when he reached the hallway Lou Reardon was missing. A small pool of blood attested to the fact that he'd been there only minutes before. A trail from the pool gave a definitive answer to the question of where he'd gone.

It was like following a spore. Lou hadn't crawled out of the house through the front door, as Harry would have expected under the circumstances. It seemed instead that he had begun climbing the stairs. Apparently, he'd improvised a tourniquet, for there was little

blood deposited on the stairs. But there was always a drop or two; he hadn't been able to staunch it completely.

Harry now had all three Reardons to contend with. This tribe didn't give up easily. They might not be smart, but they sure were dogged.

To his alarm, the trail of blood continued up the second stairway, which would bring Lou close to Elsie. That she was armed and that, as far as Harry knew, Lou wasn't, did not do much to reassure him. He wasn't certain how she would respond if this lunatic rushed her with his bare hands.

A scream rent the stillness of the house.

Harry accelerated his pace, attaining the landing on the third floor in time to see Lou, propped up on his one good leg, standing in the doorway of the bedroom. Elsie was hidden from view.

Hearing footsteps behind him, Lou swiftly glanced around. Then shut the door, locking himself and Elsie inside.

Giving little thought to his own safety, Harry threw his entire weight against the door and ripped it open.

Lou was on the bed, his body atop Elsie. At first glance, it looked as though he was raping her, his body heaving and thrashing in an effort to restrain her. But then Harry saw Lou's hands tightened about her neck. He either was so suicidally intent on strangling her that he failed to register Harry's dramatic entry or else he simply didn't give a damn.

Harry brought up his Magnum and was about to fire when he heard a muffled report. Then a second one. Lou reared up, his hands lost their grip, and then, with one convulsive movement, he rolled over and lay still. His mouth was slack, his eyes seemed to be struggling to escape their sockets. In his stomach, and further down in his groin, two bloody wounds could be made out.

Sobbing, her face gone quite pale, Elsie gave a final push, and Lou's abused body tumbled off the bed. In her trembling hand she gripped the .22 Harry had given her. It was clear that she still could not believe she had actually fired it and killed a man, no matter that that man had been on the verge of taking her life.

Harry stepped to the side of the bed and tried comforting her as best he could. She cried for several moments against his shoulder. She said something Harry couldn't comprehend at first but which she kept repeating over and over. "It shouldn't have to be this way," was what she was saying. "It shouldn't have to be this way."

At that instant there were three shots, all in quick succession. One, from Tom Jr.'s gun, struck a pillow stuffed with duck down. The

sudden flurry of feathers gave the illusion that it was snowing inside the room.

The other two shots, from his father's Enforcer, were more skillfully aimed. The first entered Elsie's back, below her left shoulder, and traveled at a slightly upward trajectory, severing the main artery leading from the heart. The second hit the fleshy portion of her left arm, which was partially extended around Harry's neck.

The fatal bullet had injured Harry as well, tearing a hole in his side, but it had lost much of its momentum during its passage through Elsie. The wound was much less grievous than it otherwise would have been, and at first Harry felt no pain.

He hadn't even realized, in those critical moments, that Elsie had been hit. He'd heard the shots, but they were so unexpected that he didn't immediately understand where they were coming from. Then Elsie gasped, her eyes widening. Her hands clawed at Harry's back and then her head drooped, her auburn hair spilling down into his lap. Copious amounts of blood pulsed out of her breast, soaking Harry.

"Elsie!" he cried out, knowing that she was lost and not wanting to believe it possible.

Her body had fallen against Harry in such a way that when the Reardons opened up again, she was protecting him. Since Elsie and Harry were saturated with so much blood, the father and son held their fire for a short interval, assuming that they had killed both their intended victims.

In that interval Harry reached his hand far enough to get hold of the Magnum that he had briefly put down.

Neither Tom Sr. nor Tom Jr. appeared to notice this.

"They got Lou, Pa," the young man was saying. He did not sound grief-stricken so much as surprised.

"It happens like that sometimes, boy. But we got them good. Now let's blow this mother."

"Too late," Harry said, raising himself up.

They both gazed stupidly at him as though this were Lazarus they were seeing, come back from the dead.

Tom Jr. actually had quicker reflexes than his father. But he wasn't much good when it came to shooting on target. He fired just as Harry did.

Then he dropped his gun and looked down to where the blood was coming. He was astounded to find that he'd been hurtled up against the wall and was now sprawled out with a big hole in his chest. He

looked up to his father as though his father might be able to get him out of this mess, just like he'd gotten him out of others.

But his father wasn't going to be of a damn bit of help. His father wasn't anywhere to be seen. He had decided to let his son take the punishment for him, and this time he wasn't about to rescue him. Actually, this time no one was about to rescue him.

Tom Jr. watched Harry get out of the bed. Harry was something to behold, a grotesque figure streaked with blood and hundreds of tiny white duck feathers, which were clinging to the blood, everywhere over his body.

Harry loomed over him, the Magnum posited at Tom Jr.'s head.

"Don't . . . ," the youth pleaded.

Harry gave him a cruel smile. "I don't think I will. It won't be necessary."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you're going to die anyway."

Tom Jr. still wasn't feeling the pain. Numbness, yes, but little pain. True, the hemorrhaging from the wound looked awfully bad, but he was so cocksure of his invincibility that he figured the worst that could happen was a long stay in the hospital.

"I ain't gonna die," he insisted and then did.

CHAPTER

Thirteen

Tom Sr. was long gone. A brief survey of the house yielded neither hide nor hair of the man. It was only after he assured himself that he was alone, that Harry turned his attention to the bullet wound that lay midway between two lower ribs. The wound appeared to be clean. The bullet had sped its way into the bedboard. Harry dressed and bandaged it, merely going through the motions because he was devastated by what had happened.

If only . . . if only . . . he kept thinking. He had let down his guard to comfort Elsie. He should never have assumed that the Reardons had left the house. He should have been more vigilant. All these things continued to run through his head, but the regret and pain they brought—pain far worse than the bullet had caused—would have to be fought off for as long as possible. He had to move. He had to drive himself forward.

He resolved that no one, who was responsible for Elsie's death, however indirectly, would escape. All the other deaths were bad enough—Turk's and the growers, identified and nameless, who had met their end in the mountains above Russian River—but it was only Elsie's that affected him. Only Elsie.

She hadn't any idea what she was getting into by inviting Harry into her house and into her bed. The truth was, no one did.

Outside, Harry heard the slam of a car door. Then another and another. Through one of the shattered windows, he saw four squad cars just pulling up in front of the house. There'd been no sirens to herald their approach. They wouldn't have wanted to alert him.

Christ, Harry thought, this is all I need.

There must have been a dozen men, many of them he assumed fresh from combat on Rain Mountain. Some began to deploy themselves along the front lawn, while others were scrambling about back. All looked heavily armed.

A cream-colored Chevy was slowly making its way down the street. It came to a stop and two men emerged. Both of them Harry recognized.

The first was predictable. It was his old friend Ham Kelso.

The second was Frank Davenport. Here was a man who would kiss ass for anyone, Harry thought.

Davenport had been assigned the role of spokesman. Maybe it was felt that since he had been, more or less, on friendly terms with Harry, Harry would listen to him. Though if he hadn't been able to persuade him that afternoon, there were no grounds for him to believe that Harry would be any more responsive now.

Nonetheless, he took hold of his bullhorn and called to Harry.

"Callahan! Callahan! Can you hear me, Callahan?"

Davenport's voice carried well. Harry had no problem hearing him but he was more interested in the strategy the police were instituting to effect his capture. Or was it his death?

Two men were busy adjusting a floodlight which focused a savage beam on one of the second floor windows. Harry wasn't there. They moved the floodlight, trying the next window, and the next. The windows remained conspicuously empty.

It was perhaps the result of being plunged into so much violence and carnage in so short a span of time, maybe it was only his overheated imagination at work, but what Harry did first was to hoist up Lou's body and prop it in the window.

When the floodlight illuminated him, nobody knew quite what to think. Davenport ceased his harangue. The police raised their AR15's to open fire and riddle the deceased Lou Reardon with still more bullets.

When Harry put Tom Jr. on display, it was apparent that the men assembled below thought that he'd simply gone around the bend.

"Harry, what the hell do you think you're doing? What kind of a stunt is this?" Davenport's voice betrayed his confusion.

Harry wasn't quite sure himself. All he knew was that he was making a whole lot of people very nervous. They had no idea what they were dealing with.

"Harry," Davenport continued, growing hoarse from all the shouting he was doing. "Harry, be reasonable. This thing can be settled without any further violence."

Before it had been Callahan. Now it was Harry. That was about as intimate as Davenport got with anyone.

Harry, however, wasn't responding. Instead, keeping low so that he could not be spotted, he raised one window up high and with a shove, propelled Lou's corpse straight down to the lawn. Everyone backed away, strangely apprehensive. They weren't certain what would come

next.

What came next was Tom Jr., who landed in an unceremonious heap several yards from his uncle.

“Callahan! If you don’t come out within three minutes we’ll have to come in and get you.”

The man’s lost all patience, Harry thought, it was back to Callahan. No further friendly approaches could be expected.

Across the front lawn, Harry noticed two men with what looked like smoke bombs. They were going to a great deal of expense simply to dispose of one man. But this did make sense. Harry was the only person who threatened McPheeters’ empire and that empire was worth, potentially, millions of dollars. You could buy and sell Russian River a hundred times over with the money he stood to gain. It was no wonder they wanted Harry expunged.

Actually, with his allotted three minutes clicking away, Harry had very little idea as to what he was going to do. But he had one final show for them. He hated to do this, but he was determined to force Davenport to acknowledge the consequence of his eager collaboration with McPheeters.

Gently, he lifted Elsie and set her into the frame of the bedroom window where she would be most easily visible. Predictably, the floodlight swept up the length of the house, coming to rest on her. She looked somehow unreal in that intense and dramatic light. Her face was whiter than wax, the great stain of blood drying beneath her breasts. Her arms were fixed, in rigor mortis, in a last embrace.

Davenport had put the bullhorn to his lips to say something more but he said not a word. He was paralyzed with shock.

“The Reardons did this, Davenport! Under orders from McPheeters!” Harry shouted to him. These were the first words he’d addressed to him the whole time. “These are the men you’re working for, Davenport! You can see their handiwork for yourself.”

Now that Harry had established his location in the house, Ham decided to waste no time. “Hell, it was Callahan who killed her, everyone knows that.” He fired at the window where Elsie’s body was positioned. Glass sprinkled down over the men on the lawn and punctured a hole in the dead woman’s forehead.

This so infuriated Davenport, that he hit Ham squarely in the jaw, breaking it, and sending the obese cop pitching backwards to the ground.

Ham scowled, determinedly rubbing his swollen jaw. He didn’t seem to comprehend what he’d done wrong.

Davenport didn't care what Ham Kelso thought. He had lost interest in the proceedings. He was going home to mourn.

"What the hell are you doing?" Ham asked. When he spoke, blood and a chipped tooth flew out of his mouth.

Davenport ignored him, opened the door of the Chevy and got in.

Ham shakily rose to his feet. He refused to allow Davenport to close the door. "We haven't finished with him," he said.

"It's your goddamn show now," Davenport said, struggling to shut the door so that he could drive off. But Ham wouldn't permit him to.

Across from them, several officers were viewing this confrontation, their attention drawn away from the house where Harry awaited their attack.

"I'm through, Ham, don't you understand? It's over. I'm out of it."

He started the ignition. If Ham wasn't going to let him close the door he'd drive away with it open.

"You can't drop out of it," Ham said, spitting out still more chipped teeth and blood. "Too late." He thrust his gun into Davenport's face.

"Bullshit, too late. I've had it with all of you."

Davenport put the car into gear, but before he could press his foot to the gas, Ham shot at pointblank range.

The top of Davenport's head seemed to come off with an enormous spurt of blood. His foot went down on the gas pedal anyway, the momentum carrying through the motion even though the life was gone from him. The car shot forward. It was all Ham could do to get out of the way.

The Chevy increased speed for a few moments and then it veered sharply to the left, careened into a rickety porch and came to a stop.

This unexpected turn of events was so startling that, at first, no one knew what to do. They gaped at Ham, fearful of exciting him further as long as he had a weapon in his hand.

Gradually, as though they were all imprisoned in a slow motion film, they mobilized. Three men raced up to where Davenport's car had ground to a halt. A woman lived in the house whose porch had just been demolished. She, with her children, was perched on the threshold, staring at the spectacle with wonder and fright. An ambulance had been summoned, but Davenport, like Lou and Tom Jr. and Elsie before him, was past all medical attention.

Wardell Marsh had hoped to remain detached from this whole affair. In his eyes, it wasn't his business. It was McPheeters'. He wanted nothing to do with it. But obviously, things had gotten out of

hand. He now appeared to supervise the officers and see if the situation could be salvaged. After Ham's impulsive act this did not seem possible.

Harry had watched what had happened with much the same incredulity as everyone else. He was aware that Ham was psychotic, but he had not believed Kelso would have committed a murder so blatantly. Either he was blindly stupid, and this certainly was a strong possibility, or else he was confident that he could get away with even an act of this magnitude because of McPheeters' protection.

Wardell Marsh, from a distance, looked very old and tired. He seemed to be suffering from a gimp leg, dragging it behind him.

He approached Ham and spoke to him quietly. Whatever he was saying must have made some impression on the cop because he simply nodded. He turned over his gun to the sheriff.

A pair of his fellow officers escorted him to one of the squad cars and stayed with him there.

Then Marsh turned to the next order of business. He picked up the bullhorn that Davenport had been using and called to Harry.

"Harry, this is the sheriff. I'd like to come in and talk to you. I want to reason this thing out peacefully if that's at all possible. I am coming in unarmed. I'll have my arms up so you can be sure of that. I promise you there won't be any more shooting unless you provoke it. Do you agree?"

Harry shouted back to him that his terms were agreeable and the sheriff began his march toward the house.

Harry wondered how things had been allowed to get this way. Here he was being made to feel as though he were a major felon, one of the ten most wanted men on the FBI roster. In fact, the criminals were running loose in Russian River, undeterred by the forces of law or morality.

Whether Wardell Marsh was personally honest was almost immaterial. Anyone in his position would be subject to the very same influences and pressures that had been Davenport's undoing. That Marsh had proven himself adept at the game, that he had survived for twelve years in the same position—winning biannual elections with monotonous regularity—meant only that he was either corrupt or a willing team player. Whichever it was, Harry certainly had grounds for suspicion.

But he recognized the necessity of dealing with Marsh. Having explored every inch of the house, he had come to the conclusion that there was no way he could escape it without running straight into

formidable opposition. Not for one moment did he doubt that the men dug in around the house would throw as much firepower as they could at him. In short, his chances of escape were dismal.

Marsh stood at the entrance to the house. Harry told him that the door was open. He certainly wasn't prepared to greet the sheriff and expose himself to the line of fire. Ham had shown dramatically that Russian River's police force did not necessarily respect the lives of its own.

Marsh studied Harry for awhile, he didn't seem to know what to make of him. "You got feathers in your hair," was what he finally said.

He slumped down on a stair and gazed balefully down at the oblong patch of Lou Reardon's blood that was drying on the floor.

"I have a feeling I'm going to have to speed up my retirement," he muttered. "Between you and Turk, I don't know which one is worse. You both fucked everything up."

It was clear that he was like Davenport in this respect, if you kept to yourself and tried not to make any waves, life could be enjoyed to an advanced age. Then Harry came along and disrupted everything.

"You've got to break eggs if you want to get an omlette," Harry reminded him, borrowing some revolutionary rhetoric for the occasion. The sheriff didn't seem to understand.

"I suppose there's no sense trying to work this out now, is there? You got your view, I got mine, the people out there, they got theirs. To tell you the truth, I don't hold you in high esteem, but I'd rather not have another body to explain. There've been more than enough bodies since Turk lit out for Rain Mountain. Lost too many good men."

"It warms my heart to hear you say that."

"Yes, indeed it must. What I would like to propose is this. You come along with me now, of your own free will. We'll get into my car and drive to the courthouse. There we can put you in protective custody."

"Protective custody? I don't like it. My sense is that the people you have to protect me might decide to lynch me at sunrise if they got in the mood."

The sheriff nodded. He could see Harry's point. "Well, there's either that or I order my men to come in and get you. You can be the judge of which appeals to you more."

He stood up to go. "Well?"

"It looks like you have a guest for the night, Sheriff."

CHAPTER

Fourteen

Protective custody so much resembled imprisonment that Harry was hard-pressed to figure out what the difference could be. He'd been placed in a cell that duplicated in every respect the one that he'd been housed in only a few nights before. Only this time, he had the cell to himself.

He fell into a restless sleep from which he would wake every hour or so. Each time he returned to consciousness, he would have to take stock all over again. In the first few moments of coming to, he would remember Elsie. He then would remember she was dead. It was not easy falling back to sleep.

The corridor outside the holding cell was eerily silent particularly in view of the commotion that had dominated it two days ago when dozens of officials were scrambling around in preparation for the march up Rain and Lunar mountains. Two overhead fluorescent lights flickered noisily down the corridor, but other than that there was no illumination. The 60-watt bulb in Harry's cell was black and dead. It stood to reason that there were other prisoners. Perhaps they were just sleeping. In any event, they were loath to signal their presence. Not even a loud snore could be heard.

Towards midnight there was a loud clanging of doors, accompanied by raucous voices.

Now two guards appeared, holding onto a man who squirmed and swore but could do nothing to escape from his captors. He was about thirty, unshaven, with unruly hair, and the pallor of a drug addict. His eyes were bloodshot, his lips gray, in sum, he was no one you would invite home to dinner.

The guards dragged him down the corridor until they were directly outside of Harry's cell. The door was unlocked and the prisoner was thrown in. "You can keep each other entertained," one of the guards said, slamming the door closed.

Why, Harry wondered, if other cells were empty, which seemed to be the case, was a roommate being inflicted on him? He was in no mood for company, especially when the company was this unsavory character.

He now raised himself off the floor and regarded Harry with indifference. Then he moved over to the empty bunk and slumped down on it. “Shit,” he said after a while. “Keith Monk is what people in these parts call me.”

“I’m glad they call you something,” said Harry, stretching his legs out. He closed his eyes.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“I’m going to sleep.”

“Don’t go to sleep yet!” Monk pleaded. “We haven’t even gotten acquainted.”

“That’s just how I’d like things to remain.”

The man refused to take the hint and continued rambling. Harry surmised that Monk must be a speed freak because he was incapable of shutting up. It was essential for him to talk and it made no difference what the subject was, why he detested his girlfriend, why he’d been busted, why his father should be killed and his mother put out to pasture, why he’d been fired from his last job. Life was just generally unfair to Keith Monk and he’d always gotten the short end of the stick. It wasn’t even his fault. It was his father’s fault and his girlfriend’s fault—“the goddamn cunt” as he repeatedly referred to her—and one day they’d all see.

Harry was so exhausted that most of Monk’s tirade never penetrated. It was like the white noise a fan makes or the ocean breaking against the rocks. Then, abruptly, he stopped. Had he fallen asleep or had he just decided to quit? Harry didn’t know or care what his motives were, he was only thankful that he was silent.

How many minutes passed after that Harry could not be sure, but it could not have been very many. Keith Monk evidently was not asleep. Harry could hear him begin to move, but he was taking care to make no more noise than necessary. Harry doubted that this was done out of politeness. Monk had not shown himself to be a man much bound by etiquette.

Unquestionably, Monk was under the impression that Harry was asleep and Harry did nothing to disabuse him of this notion. He lay still, but he opened one eye—just a slit. In the dimness of the cell, Monk was a shadowy figure who was slowly bridging the distance that separated his bunk from Harry’s. Something caught the distant light from out in the corridor and glinted with it. A razor.

Now Harry understood why Keith Monk had been put into the cell with him. It made perfect sense; one prisoner kills the other in a heated dispute. The officials in charge would deplore the incident and

order an investigation. After enough time had gone by for the furor—should there be any—to die down, Monk would be quietly transferred and rewarded for his help in ridding Russian River of a threat to its peace and illegal prosperity. What form that reward would take was hard to imagine. It might be that Monk would in turn be killed, hanged in his cell in a suicide attempt. Not that he'd have much say in the suicide.

And why had Monk rambled on and on if not to assure himself that Harry was finally completely out of it?

Monk hesitated for an instant. He stood over Harry, ready to slash Harry's throat with one sweeping motion. Although he was tempted to strike, Harry remained still. He wanted Monk to think that he enjoyed the advantage, that he had all the time in the world to carry out his murderous enterprise.

It was only when Monk was about to run the blade straight across his throat that Harry leaped up, butting his head into Monk's chest.

Monk was so surprised that he gave way immediately. His legs buckled and he fell back. But he still clung to the razor which he proceeded to slash the air with in an effort to keep Harry at a distance.

He was breathing hard and he kept leaping from one point to another as though he were attempting a strange little dance, a dance that was necessarily confined given how small a space he had available to work in.

"Come on, sucker, what are you waiting for?" he said, beckoning Harry toward him with his free hand.

Harry decided he wasn't about to squander his energy chasing this clown around and around the cell. Instead, he stayed where he was, his posture challenging Monk to take the initiative.

Monk had no patience. As Harry suspected, he soon tired of doing his little jig around his victim-to-be. He still hadn't recovered from the shock of discovering that Harry was prepared for him. As a result, he was taking greater risks, hoping to speedily conclude this business. Because he was armed, and Harry was not, he still believed that the odds were in his favor.

He lunged forward and when he swung his blade down, aiming for Harry's wrist, he succeeded only in ripping his sleeve. Still he laughed victoriously as though, whether it was cloth or flesh he still had scored.

All Harry would do when he came at him was to turn to the other side or swivel in such a manner that Monk's momentum would carry

him to the far end of the cell. Harry was playing the matador and Monk, unwittingly, had fallen into the role of the bull.

He advanced again, grinning maliciously, his eyes wild with the frenzy in his blood. It was just possible that he really didn't care whether he died.

This time though, Harry kicked out his leg. Monk was not expecting this and he virtually somersaulted right over it, banging his head as he landed.

Slightly stunned, he did not get up right away, which was fine with Harry. He seized hold of Monk by the scruff of the neck and knocked his head twice more against the hard stone surface of the floor.

This had the effect of severely debilitating him for afterwards he didn't move. He was alive in spite of the blood that was oozing out of him. And the blood, as Harry shortly discovered, was not from his battered head. It was swollen and red and the skin was broken, but it was not bleeding. No, the source of it was his hand. In falling, he'd cut himself badly on the razor and the gash across his palm looked as if it went quite deep.

Harry started shouting and banging on the bars until he elicited a response from one of the two guards whom he'd seen earlier with Monk.

The guard probably had expected to see Harry's body sprawled out on the floor like this, not Monk. He scowled and shook his head.

"How did this happen?" he asked wearily.

"Fucking guy attacked me with a razor."

"I don't understand how that could've happened." The guard rattled his keys as he unlocked the cell. "We searched him."

"Not good enough."

Just as the guard stooped down to inspect how serious Monk's injuries were, Harry took hold of him from behind and heaved him across the room, then leapt out of the cell, closing the door and locking it behind him.

The guard was fumbling with his gun, but by the time he could extract it from the holster, Harry was no longer around to be shot at.

But the guard's cries of alarm did not go unheard. As Harry was proceeding up the corridor two more men materialized. Their movements were slow, as though they'd just been roused from a profound sleep. Nor had they drawn their guns out, probably because they couldn't quite hear what their colleague was yelling about. In an instant, they realized their mistake but by then Harry was upon them.

He grappled with one while the other kept circling idiotically around, trying to sight him and fire. But to do this he was apt to risk shooting his partner, so he held off.

As Harry struggled, the pain from the wound he'd sustained earlier asserted itself, and with such intensity, that Harry thought he might black out. But he couldn't allow that to happen. He might never recover consciousness.

He threw his opponent into the wall and locked his wrist with his hands and twisted it enough so that the bone audibly cracked. The gun clattered to the floor.

The second guard now chose to fire, but Harry was no longer where he just had been and the bullet slammed into the wall, scaring his partner far more than Harry. Scooping up the .38, Harry directed it at the second guard. He was an older man, little accustomed to contending with situations this dramatic, so he promptly surrendered his weapon into Harry's hands.

Harry ordered them to lie down and this they did. Particularly the man whose wrist he'd broken, he was in such pain that he could barely stand up as it was.

Being familiar with the layout of the courthouse, he had no difficulty finding his way to the exit. It seemed too easy; there was no one else about to block his progress and the guards that he'd just disarmed showed no intention of pursuing him.

When he got to the courthouse doors that would lead out to Van Buren Street, he felt instinctively he might be in trouble. He couldn't say why he had this feeling exactly but it was a very powerful one.

So what he did was gently depress the brass handle and open the door on his right, then jump back.

There was a sudden blaze of fire. Somebody was waiting for him on the other side. The tactics had changed; if a mad junkie couldn't kill him with a razor then they would try and kill him another way. The police would announce that he was shot while attempting to escape. Moreover, he was armed. In both cases, they'd be correct too, though that would hardly be of any consolation to Harry as he lay moldering in the ground. No, on second thought, he considered, they'd cremate him, making good and sure he was gone and wouldn't be back to haunt them on Judgment Day.

He decided on an old trick. The police in Russian River weren't so very clever, an old trick might work on them. It would have to. Harry was running out of ideas.

Firing both appropriated guns simultaneously, he exposed himself in

the open doorway for just a moment, then immediately dropped to the floor as the answering fire came.

Harry didn't stir, he lay just where he was, feigning death.

Two figures rose into view. One of them was Ham Kelso, behind him was Mike Kilborn. Which of them had taken it on himself to deliver the *coup de grâce*? Harry wondered.

He was not about to wait to find out. Ham was the first up the stairs which made sense since he thought of himself as the leader. Kilborn, characteristically, lingered in the background always prepared to make a hasty retreat should circumstances warrant it.

Ham offered a terrific target area with the wide expanse of his stomach. His jaw was bandaged and one eye was banded in black—Davenport's parting legacy. But he was walking with a swagger nonetheless, obviously pleased that he could kill so easily and be spared the indignity of being punished for it.

"Freeze!" commanded Harry.

This was something he did not expect that Ham would do, but he thought he'd give the man some kind of choice.

Ham looked vastly surprised, almost hurt. It seemed to take him a very long time to make his decision. Then he swore and dropped his gun.

"Now have Kilborn do the same."

Ham gazed bleakly at Kilborn and Kilborn shrugged. He couldn't tell exactly what Kilborn was thinking because of the shades which kept his eyes hidden from view. Still, Kilborn wasn't disposed to throwing down his gun. Instead, he was backing away, a foot at a time, down the courthouse steps.

"That's it, Kilborn. As far as you go."

"Shit, man, you can't get anywhere anyhow. There ain't no cause for you to become so excited. Men in front of you, men in back of you, you are surrounded, man."

Harry had not detected anyone behind him but he could not be absolutely certain—he was tired and the exhaustion had taken the edge off—he could still slip. Almost involuntarily, he glanced in back of him, and in that single moment of inattention two things happened.

First, Kilborn split, running towards his car.

And second, Ham reached for the gun at his feet and raised it to fire.

But Ham was too fat and too slow, before he could press the trigger the two .38's in Harry's hands came to life.

Ham's stomach opened up like a ripe melon. Bleeding, it looked vaguely like a melon that had just been gouged. The cop went toppling back down the stairs with a strangled cry. For a while he lay in the bed of roses planted proximate to the stairs and thrashed frantically about, trying somehow to regain his balance. As he did he left half of himself in the rosebed. He took one look at how much blood he'd deposited on the small garden and collapsed again. He wept like a little boy with a cut knee until he died.

Harry could do nothing to stop Kilborn. He fired on his car but while the bullets did a number on the fender and crumpled in some of the rear chrome, they failed to cripple the vehicle in any significant way.

A second car presently appeared on Van Buren. A squad car with its beacon busy sending shafts of red light out onto the darkened street.

Harry watched it carefully. The two .38's were ready if necessary. He hoped they wouldn't be. He was growing tired of this.

It was Wardell Marsh. Alone.

Obviously Marsh was growing tired of this too, although in a totally different way. He approached Harry without concern. He noticed the guns in his hands but he assumed that they would not be used on him. He was right.

"My boys just called me. Told me you'd escaped," he said. Then he stared down at Ham and sighed. "I expected something like this to happen to him. Was bound to happen someday. I just didn't think it'd be this soon." He paused, still not looking at Harry. "I don't know how to put this exactly, son, but it seems to me that you've put me in a real bind."

"You tried having me killed in there. It's not something I appreciate."

"I didn't try to have you or anybody killed. Those orders came from somebody else."

"McPheeters?"

"But you see, I get the blame one way or the other," he continued, ignoring the question. "Before I got the call, I was doing some serious thinking. I've concluded that I would rather collect only half of my pension than stay in office for another five years to get it all. You see, I don't have the feeling I've got another five years in me for this. Fact is, I don't think I'd be allowed to serve out my time. Half a pension is better than a full pension you never get to collect, don't you think?"

Harry was obliged to concur with this assessment.

"What has happened is, that you just speeded up things is all. I am

going to turn in my resignation tomorrow morning. I've already packed. I see no reason to stick around Russian River the way things have developed." Now for the first time he looked Harry in the eyes. "Since you started it, I see nothing wrong with you finishing it. I just want no part of it, you understand? No part of any of it. You get your ass wasted. You deserve it. They get their asses kicked in, they deserve it too. I want you to know I really don't give a good goddamn what happens because I'm getting out of here."

He thrust a folded piece of paper into Harry's pocket.

"That there's an address. Big farmhouse outside of town. You just keep going on Van Buren and when you see a sign for the Saw Mill Restaurant, right at that junction, you turn. You go straight you'll be on 101. There's a white silo by this farmhouse, so you shouldn't have any trouble finding it."

"And what will I find at this farmhouse?"

"All your friends, I should imagine. That's the distribution center you might say, where that asshole Kilborn and the Reardons—though it seems we're down to just one of them now—store most of the weed. It's measured there, tested for quality. Some of it, as you saw, goes direct to San Francisco but most ends up at this place and is shipped on later."

"What about McPheeters? Will he be there too?"

The sheriff wasn't inclined to answer this. "McPheeters, McPheeters," he said. "What the hell are you always asking me about him for? How should I know? You go there and find out yourself!"

"One more thing."

Marsh turned to him and regarded him with obvious distaste. "Haven't I done enough already?"

"I'd like my gun back. I had to give it up, you remember?"

Marsh glared at him. "Ah, why the hell not?" he muttered. "Follow me." And he led Harry back into the courthouse that he had just had to fight his way out of.

CHAPTER

Fifteen

It was still dark when Harry reached the junction of 101 and Saw Mill Road. The sign for the Saw Mill Restaurant declared that there was no better place anywhere in the nation for "down-home country fare." It was open for lunch and dinner, with special facilities for banquets and parties. There were many hours to go before lunch or dinner was a possibility. Harry would have settled for a coffeeshop that served round-the-clock; all he'd had to eat was a stale sandwich of the kind that prisons seemed to prefer. Coffee might help. So might a good shot of whiskey.

But Saw Mill Road was empty of eating establishments that kept late hours. The Saw Mill Restaurant was an oddly Victorian-shaped house with lots of darkened windows and a big empty parking lot.

For long stretches, there was nothing but fenced-in pastures, separated at intervals by thick wooded areas. The only sign of habitation was the occasional farmhouse. But none of them was complemented by a white silo.

The road threatened to go on indefinitely. For a few minutes Harry thought somehow he might have gone by the Reardon place. But then he saw it on his left. About half a mile ahead, loomed the white silo. Beyond that, stood two hulking structures, both of which looked capable of housing an abundance of marijuana.

Harry passed right by it. He noticed that there was at least half a dozen vehicles parked in the gravel lot that adjoined the larger of the two buildings. One of them was an open-ended truck that might well have belonged to Tom Sr. From his cursory look he could not identify any of the others.

There was virtually no traffic on the road at this dull gray hour and Harry had no wish to make himself more conspicuous than he already was by leaving his Olds too close to the farm. Instead, he drove on for another mile or so, then pulled the car off to the side.

He proceeded back to the farm on foot, following the highway for much of the distance, then detouring into the neighboring woods to minimize the risk of being spotted.

The woods were a more tangled, thornier affair than he first

thought and it took him several minutes to fight his way out. At last, somewhat scratched and bruised, he managed to come out the other side, on an escarpment that overlooked the Reardon farm.

In the gathering light, he could make out a tractor out in the fields and a van that he was not able to see from the road. It very much resembled the van with government plates that he'd seen being loaded with marijuana in Russian River the day before.

This must be some operation, he thought, but his stomach sank when he considered that it had fallen to him alone to destroy it. No one else seemed interested in the responsibility or the danger that went with it. Actually, Harry could see why. It wasn't as if he hadn't been tempted to take 101 back to San Francisco and forget the whole thing. Though that was no answer; there were problems in San Francisco too. That mess with the DEA agent would have to be cleared up before he could go home again.

Harry began now to crawl down the escarpment. All the while, he scanned the area, thinking that he must be missing something. He saw no guards. He saw no one at all.

A dog barked suddenly and out of the dimness a huge German Shepherd came running, its teeth bared. Here was the guard. One of them anyhow.

It was a well-trained animal, taught to go for the jugular in one quick, savage leap. Having already exposed his Magnum, he saw no choice but to use it. He didn't have much time to consider taking alternative action.

The snarling dog was in the middle of the air when the bullet struck. That did not stop it but when it came down on Harry it did nothing more than to knock him to the ground, draped over him in death. The bullet had entered the Shepherd's open mouth and gone straight to its brain. Much of the dog's shattered brain, and a considerable quantity of its blood, had gotten over Harry. Had he the time he would have cleaned himself off before resuming this affair. But there clearly was no time to make himself presentable.

Two men, neither of them recognizable to Harry, rushed from the farmhouse off to his left, armed with Soviet-manufactured SKS 7.67 mm carbines which they proceeded to raise. But they didn't immediately fire because they could not at a distance determine whether Harry was alive or as dead as the dog obviously was. With all the blood and viscera covering him, he certainly didn't appear to be very healthy.

Harry seized the advantage and fired twice. The first man dropped so quickly that it was impossible to say where he'd been hit. The

second lurched backwards, his SKS firing ineffectually into the air. As he fell, he blew a bubble that might have been gum were it not for its bright red coloring.

Throwing the dog's body off of him, he picked himself up and raced in the direction of the farmhouse. He sidled up to its wall of brick and oak and moved flush against it. He lowered his head so he was not exposed as he passed the windows.

So far no one else had come out to try and intercept Harry, possibly because the precedent for doing so was decidedly bad. But all that meant, as far as Harry could tell, was that they were preparing a welcome for him inside.

The object was to foresee their strategy and then to outwit them at it. Reardon might not be a tactician—he was likely to come out with two guns blazing—but Kilborn had certainly demonstrated a high regard for saving his own ass. And McPheeters, if McPheeters was on the premises, was not the sort of man who would easily sacrifice his life.

He stopped right where he was and hunkered down by the side of Reardon's truck. From there, he had a clear view of the farmhouse but those inside would have immense difficulty spying him unless they conducted a search among the seven vehicles lining the lot. Harry had no intention of giving them that opportunity.

As he had surmised, the men inside the farmhouse soon ran out of patience. Since it was apparent that the intruder was not about to come to them, they were left with no alternative but to go to him.

The first to appear was Tom Sr., brandishing an M16. To his credit, he showed no sign of hesitancy. In fact, he seemed happy to have been set loose. His face was dark, reflecting his anger at losing two members of his family. He was intent on revenge. Harry had only to look at him to recognize his poisonous emotional state.

A second man, wearing a cap and a windbreaker, soon joined him. He did not appear to be as confident as Tom Sr. Harry meanwhile held his fire, hoping to lure as many of the defenders out into the open as he could.

In the last few minutes, the first light of dawn had begun to penetrate the darkened sky and it was becoming easier to see just who he was shooting at. This tactic would prove both bad and good, Harry thought, since it would also make him more visible.

Suddenly, Tom stopped. Maybe he had exceptional vision or else relied on an inherited sense for ferreting out victims even when he couldn't see them. Because he now fired his M16 at his own truck,

demolishing the windshield completely and causing glass shards to rain down on Harry. Several of the fragments perforated his skin.

"Got you that time, you fuck!" shouted Tom Sr., laughing heartily as he raced down the row of vehicles, hoping to capitalize on his surprise.

Harry barely had a chance to get up. Ignoring the new pain that resulted from the glass cuts and older pain that was his grim legacy of the past few days in Russian River, Harry slid underneath the truck and fired his Magnum exactly at that moment when Tom Sr.'s feet appeared in view.

Tom Sr. shrieked and tumbled backwards, out of Harry's line of sight.

"Goddamn whore, you fucking crippled me!"

That is just the beginning, Harry thought. He now risked crawling forward, poking his head out from under the truck—but only for a second. Even that was too much. Tom Sr., propped up with his elbows on the gravel, had been anticipating his appearance and fired several times. The first round had nearly decapitated Harry, but the ones that followed were senseless, betraying only the extent of Tom Sr.'s fury.

All Harry had wanted was an approximate idea of where Tom was. He extended his arm and mentally judging his aim, he fired his .44 twice—once a bit to the left, then to the right. The first, he assumed would probably miss Tom but would have the effect of alarming him sufficiently to shift position in the opposite direction.

Tom Reardon Sr. was predictable in this respect. He did exactly as Harry had hoped and found that his right arm had been blown virtually clean off. He screamed and hollered and rolled over into the gravel, but he wouldn't let go of the M16. He just took hold of it with his one good arm and turned it on Harry as he emerged.

At the same time, his friend in the windbreaker, who had stayed in the background, tried his luck with the Ruger Mauser he carried. The Ruger was a good gun but its owner wasn't adept with it.

His shots slammed into the side of Tom's truck, disfiguring the door on the passenger side. Harry ducked, returning to safety underneath the truck. For one thing, he needed to reload. For another, he hadn't counted on Tom Sr. being able to sustain resistance.

Tom Sr. was now dragging his mutilated body through the dust and gravel. He would blast Harry away under the truck if he couldn't do so in the open.

Harry saw the barrel of the M16 and slid over to the right in order to avoid getting in the way of the shot when it inevitably came. But it

was apparent that Tom Sr. meant to spray the entire area under the truck in the belief that sooner or later he had to hit Harry. There was no way that Harry could keep changing positions fast enough. So he did the only thing possible and fired directly at the M16. As if in response, the barrel spun and flew out of sight.

Tom Sr. raged some more; he wasn't through yet. He succeeded in getting his Enforcer out and was prepared to use that. But with the blood pumping out of him and the pain from his wounds, he was not able to move fast enough. Harry squeezed himself under the car parked next to the truck in the interim, leaving Tom Sr. laying down a barrage in the spot that he had just vacated.

"Over here, Tom!" Harry signalled to him.

Tom Sr. raised his eyes, more venomous than before, and unsteadily sighted his handgun. He was ambidextrous—at least with a gun—but his skill was ebbing along with his life. Harry, protected by this red Toyota, took his time and blew Tom Reardon Sr.'s face from its moorings.

The man in the windbreaker ran behind another parked car and fired back at Harry with his Mauser. Harry responded in kind. The man went hurtling into the air and came down in the dust. He didn't move.

These proceedings had not gone unobserved. When Harry looked toward the farmhouse, he beheld Mike Kilborn's face framed in a window. The face vanished. A door slammed a few moments later.

Harry hastened around to the other side of the house just in time to see Kilborn scuttling into one of the fields.

While he was no longer a threat, Harry hated the idea that he might escape. He'd only pop up again another day and cause more mischief. That kind always did.

Harry wanted to chase him but Kilborn had the advantage. He was younger, nimbler, and had not been hit by a bullet the night before or been cut by glass a few minutes ago. And he probably had had the benefit of a good night's sleep.

There just didn't seem to be any way of catching up with him. Moreover, if he tried to, whoever else was left in the house might slip away.

As soon as he stepped inside the barn, he dropped to the floor, fully expecting to be peppered by another M16. This did not occur.

He found himself in a cavernous space demarcated by a succession of large support beams, that rose eighteen feet up to the ceiling.

The floor was covered with sawdust and everywhere Harry looked

were heaped kilos of marijuana. Some of them wrapped and camouflaged, others exposed to the open so that their contents stood revealed, green and brown under the powerful lights that had been strung across the ceiling. Seeing in this case wasn't necessary for believing; one's nose could render an equally precise judgment as to the nature of the goods that were stored here.

Marijuana was not the only item to be found. A small arsenal was also present. In addition to the M16s and the AK47s, the SKS 7.67 mms and the AR15s, there were also bazookas and what, on superficial examination, appeared to be sophisticated antitank devices. The sort of artillery that could be used to blow a chopper or two out of the sky.

Harry kept exploring the house, expecting at any moment to confront further opposition. But with the exception of Kilborn, he seemed to have run clean out of people who were anxious to kill him.

He found a staircase at the far end of the building and this led him to a second floor which protruded like a balcony over the vastness of the storage space. Here, the floor was lined with canvas. A number of closed doors were situated to his left. He opened each, carefully, standing back as he did so in case someone was waiting in ambush.

The first door he opened, yielded a john with a toilet that had overflowed so that the floor was immersed in at least three inches of water. The second door disclosed a room which had been laid out for the weighing and testing of the grass. There were several scales on the table and a pungent smell of a variety of chemicals, which could be seen in the bottoms of beakers and test tubes.

Behind the third door, Harry detected a slight movement. The door was locked. He shot the lock off and crashed through.

There, sitting in a rocking chair that looked as if it had been salvaged from somebody's attic, was Howard McPheeters. He looked very old and gray. He held a small revolver in his hand, but there was no indication that he meant to use it against Harry. He clutched it fervently.

When Harry burst in, he did not look up. There was nothing left of the cold self-important figure Harry had first seen in San Francisco and later in Russian River when the invasion was just getting underway. He seemed to have shriveled. The spirit was gone.

"Why didn't you run like your friend Kilborn?" Harry asked him.

He shrugged. "There would have been no point. It's over. It got too big. Too messy. It involved too many people. It was bound to happen, I suppose. I thought though, I could anticipate events, you understand.

I couldn't."

"There are other countries."

"I considered fleeing. But by the time I did, it was too late. A warrant's been issued for my arrest." He directed his gaze at Harry. "You just precipitated things, that's all. It makes no difference at this point."

"Why don't you give me the gun?" Harry approached him.

"That is something you shall not deny me."

When he lifted his Beretta, Harry reacted by sighting his .44, but McPheeters was undeterred.

"Maybe you want to save me the trouble?" he said, putting the gun to his head and firing before Harry could get to him.

Half of his skull seemed to crumble. His eyes narrowed, and his face, for a moment, turned as green as the marijuana plants sitting in bales downstairs. His body bounced slightly against the back of the chair, propelling the chair into a slightly faster motion. Harry left him like that, rocking his way into eternity.

There were windows in this part of the house, though they'd been obscured by strips of the same canvas that covered the floor.

Harry studied the landscape for a sign of Kilborn. To his astonishment, he spied him—a mere speck of white—in the distance, practically submerged in a field of hay. He wasn't going very fast. Maybe he'd run out of breath. More likely, he had concluded that since no one seemed to be coming after him, there was no sense in maintaining such a rapid pace.

I am going to get this son of a bitch, Harry resolved. He went back to McPheeters, and without interrupting his perpetual motion, dug into his pockets finding a set of keys.

Among the keys was one that started up the government van. Harry maneuvered it out into the fields. The high grass whipped against the van as he drove, gaining speed as he did so.

Kilborn came into view, though he was still a considerable distance away. He obviously had heard the van coming. At first he stared at it, without moving. Unable to see the driver he probably thought that his luck had changed, that it was McPheeters at the wheel.

But as the van got closer to him, he comprehended how much in error he was. With an expression of pain on his face, he bolted, half-running, half-skipping through the field. Occasionally, he'd stumble, then quickly regain his balance, and continue. Of course, there was no way he was going to outrun a moving vehicle and he soon realized

this for he spun around, gun in hand.

But the van was intended to be bulletproof. While the windshield registered the impact of his shots, forming a web of cracks, it failed to give way. Nevertheless, Harry kept his head low, in case the windshield failed to live up to its billing.

When Kilborn saw that he had failed to stop the van, he turned and started running again. His shades slipped off, and in place of the faintly ominous appearance that they'd given him, was the look of a bewildered boy who'd gotten lost.

Then he surprised Harry by flattening himself in the path of the oncoming vehicle. Harry couldn't stop, or redirect the van in time and ran right over him. But he heard none of the sounds one would customarily expect to hear as a result of running over a body. He guessed that being as thin as he was, Kilborn had managed to position himself so that all four tires missed him completely.

Harry couldn't be sure though. He brought the van to a stop, opened the door and peered back.

His supposition was correct. Kilborn was alive. He took aim at Harry and fired. The open door shuddered in response. Harry fired back before Kilborn could get off a second shot.

The .44 took Kilborn in the center of his pale sweating brow and sent him tumbling back into the hay.

The sun was making its way above the horizon, shedding a pale pink light on the farm. It was the first time Harry could remember, since his arrival in Russian River, that he'd seen the sun without a layer of clouds in its way. It was an auspicious sign.

He directed the van back out on the Saw Mill Road, abandoning it near where he'd left the Olds. In the Olds, he took the other way back to 101 and San Francisco. He hoped never to see Russian River again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANE HARTMAN was a Warner Books imprint pseudonym used by two American novelists, Ric Meyers and Leslie Alan Horvitz. "Hartman" was credited as the author of the Dirty Harry action series based on the “Dirty” Harry Callahan character of the popular 1970’s and 1980’s films starring Clint Eastwood.

Following the release of the third Dirty Harry movie, The Enforcer, in 1976, Clint Eastwood made it clear that he did not intend to make any more Dirty Harry movies. In 1981, Warner Books (the publishing arm of Warner Bros., which made the films) began publishing a number of men’s adventure series under its now-defunct "Men of Action" line. One such series features the further adventures of Inspector Harry Callahan. The series was brought to an end when Eastwood decided to direct, produce, and star in a fourth Dirty Harry movie, Sudden Impact, which was released in December 1983.

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